The Ring around *The Rose*: Jay DeFeo and her Circle

By

Elizabeth Allison Ferrell

A dissertation submitted for partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Emerita Anne M. Wagner, Chair
Professor Emeritus Timothy Clark
Professor Shannon Jackson
Professor Darcy Grigsby

Fall 2012
Abstract

The Ring around *The Rose*

by

Elizabeth Allison Ferrell

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Emerita Anne M. Wagner, Chair

From 1958 to 1966, the San Francisco artist Jay DeFeo (1929-89) worked on one artwork almost exclusively – a monumental oil-on-canvas painting titled *The Rose*. The painting’s protracted production isolated DeFeo from the mainstream art world and encouraged contemporaries to cast her as Romanticism’s lonely genius. However, during its creation, *The Rose* also served as an important matrix for collaboration among artists in DeFeo’s bohemian community. Her neighbors – such as Wallace Berman (1926-76) and Bruce Conner (1933-2008) – appropriated the painting in their works, blurring the boundaries of individual authorship and blending production and reception into a single process of exchange. I argue that these simultaneously creative and social interactions opened up the autonomous artwork, cloistered studio, and the concept of the individualistic artist championed in Cold-War America to negotiate more complex relationships between the individual and the collective.
To the memory of my best friend, Mila Noelle Rainof, M.D.,
whose compassion and courage will always inspire the best things I do
Table of Contents

List of Figures...........................................................................................................iii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................xi

Introduction ...............................................................................................................1

Chapter 1..................................................................................................................24
“S.F. Paintings in N.Y. Exhibit”: The legibility of Jay DeFeo’s artistic practice in “Sixteen Americans”

Chapter 2.................................................................................................................82
“The Individual and his World”: Representing the Fillmore circle to the postwar public

Chapter 3..................................................................................................................145
Artist’s Model / Model Artist: Wallace Berman’s photographs of Jay DeFeo

Chapter 4..................................................................................................................202
Myth, Memory and Make-believe: Jay DeFeo’s creative process after and through The Rose

Conclusion................................................................................................................261

Bibliography..............................................................................................................280

Appendix....................................................................................................................290
Timeline of Jay DeFeo’s dealings with The Rose, 1965-74
List of Figures

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 10-23

Figure 1: 2322 Fillmore Street, Google Maps, 2011, digital photograph

Figure 2: View from the hallway into the kitchen of 2322 Fillmore Street, c. 1955, photograph

Figure 3: View of the communal stairwell of 2322 Fillmore Street, Jerry Burchard, 1959, gelatin silver print

Figure 4: Wally Hedrick welding in the courtyard of 2322 Fillmore Street, Jerry Burchard, 1959, gelatin silver print

Figure 5: Jay DeFeo washing dishes in 2322 Fillmore Street, December 1961, photograph

Figure 6: Christmas card to Dorothy Miller, Wally Hedrick, 1959, mimeograph print, glitter, postage stamp and mark, 8 ½ x 11 inches

Figure 7: The Rose, Jay DeFeo, 1958-1966, oil with wood and mica on canvas, 10 ¾ x 7 ⅔ x 1 feet

Figure 8: Photograph of The Rose, c. 1960

Figure 9: Photograph of The Rose, c. 1963

Figure 10: DeFeo in her studio, c. 1961, photograph

Figure 11: Jay DeFeo in the living room of 2322 Fillmore Street, c. 1956, photograph

Figure 12: Jay DeFeo in her studio at 2322 Fillmore Street, Jerry Burchard, 1959, gelatin silver print

Figure 13: Jay DeFeo’s friends carrying The Rose to its new frame, c. December 1959, photograph

Figure 14: Detail of untitled correspondence for Wallace Berman, Jay DeFeo, 1965, mixed media, approx. 16 x 16 inches

Chapter 1 .................................................................................................................................................. 58-81

Figure 1: Reproduction of The Rose in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog, 1959

Figure 2: Jay DeFeo and two unidentified men in the Dilexi Gallery, 1959, gelatin silver print, 7 x 5 inches
Figure 3: Diagram of Jay DeFeo’s exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery, San Francisco, 1959

Figure 4: Works in Jay DeFeo’s exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery, San Francisco, 1959

Figure 5: Works in Jay DeFeo’s gallery at “Sixteen Americans,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959-1960

Figure 6: Diagram of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959-1960

Figure 7: Installation view of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” showing Origin (1956), Death Wish (1958), and Persephone (1957), Soichi Sunami, 1959, photograph, 7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches

Figure 8: Installation view of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” showing Daphne (1958) and The Veronica (1957) with Louise Nevelson’s gallery visible in the background, Soichi Sunami, 1959, photograph, 7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches

Figure 9: Installation view of Jim Jarvaise’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans,” Soichi Sunami, 1959, photograph, 7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches

Figure 10: Installation view of Frank Stella’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” with Jim Jarvaise’s works visible in the background, Rudy Bruckhardt, 1959, photograph, 7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches

Figure 11: Daphne, Jay DeFeo, 1958, Charcoal, graphite and oil on paper mounted on canvas, 106 x 42 inches

Figure 12: Origin, Jay DeFeo, 1956, oil on canvas, 92 x 79 ¾ inches

Figure 13: Death Wish, Jay DeFeo, 1958, charcoal, graphite and oil on paper, 89 x 43 ¼ inches

Figure 14: The Veronica, Jay DeFeo, 1957, oil on canvas, 132 x 42 ½ inches

Figure 15: Persephone, Jay DeFeo, 1957, graphite, charcoal, and oil paint on paper mounted on canvas, 88 x 41 inches

Figure 16: Apollo and Daphne, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1622-25, marble, 88 x 41 inches

Figure 17: Onement I, Barnett Newman, 1948, oil on canvas, 27 ¼ x 16 ¼ inches

Figure 18: View of Landscape with Figure (c. 1955), Death Wish (1958), and Daphne (1958) installed in the Dilexi Gallery, 1959, 35mm slide

Figure 19: The Wise and Foolish Virgins, Jay DeFeo, 1958, oil, house paint, charcoal, and graphite on paper mounted on two canvases, 129 x 42 ½ inches each
Figure 20: View of *Applaud the Black Fact* (1958), *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* (1958), and *Bird of Paradise* (c. 1957) installed in the Dilexi Gallery, 1959, gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 inches

Figure 21: *Applaud the Black Fact*, Jay DeFeo, 1958, collage on paper mounted on painted canvas, 51 x 36 inches

Figure 22: Installation view of Ellsworth Kelly’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” with Jay DeFeo’s *The Veronica* (1957) visible in the background, Soichi Sunami, 1959, photograph, 7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches

Figure 23: Card sent by Jay DeFeo to Dorothy Miller that includes a piece of *The Rose*, December 1960

Chapter 2 ..................................................................................................................117-144

Figure 1: Photo-panel of Jeremy Anderson for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 2: Photo-panel of Joe Botherton for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 3: Photo-panel of Bruce Conner for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 4: Photo-panel of Jay DeFeo for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 5: Photo-panel of Helen Dunham for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 6: Photo-panel of Art Grant for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 7: Photo-panel of Wally Hedrick for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 8: Photo-panel of Seymour Locks for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 9: Photo-panel of David Simpson for “The Individual and his World,” Jerry Burchard, 1959, 24 x 20 inches

Figure 10: “Art in the Bank,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26, 1962
Figure 11: Cover of *House and Garden*, January 1957

Figure 12: Two installation photographs of “17 Contemporary American Painters” in the United States Pavilion at the Brussels World’s Fair, 1958

Figure 13: Photograph of the “Soviet and U.S. Pavilions at Brussels Fair” reproduced in “All’s Fair,” *Time*, April 28, 1958, 29

Figure 14: Ad Reinhardt and family at home, Hans Namuth, 1958, photograph

Figure 15: Delphine Seyrig, Robert Indiana, Duncan Youngerman, Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, and Agnes Martin at Coenties Slip, Hans Namuth, 1958, photograph

Figure 16: Ellsworth Kelly with Delphine Seyrig and Duncan Youngerman in Kelly’s Coenties Slip studio, Hans Namuth, 1958, photograph

Figure 17: Contact sheet of Wally Hedrick and Joan Brown in the courtyard of 2322 Fillmore Street, Jerry Burchard, 1959, 8 x 11 inches

Figure 18: Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick in their Fillmore Street apartment, Jerry Burchard, 1959, photograph

Figures 19-20: Wally Hedrick painting at 2322 Fillmore Street with *The Rose* in the background, Jerry Burchard, 1959, photograph

Figure 21: William Baziotes with neighborhood children in Harlem, New York City, Hans Namuth, 1958, photograph

Figure 22: Two portraits of Jay DeFeo, Jerry Burchard, 1959, photographs

Figure 23: Richard Diebenkorn with his dog in Berkeley, California, Hans Namuth, 1958, photograph

Figure 24: Barnett Newman, New York City, Hans Namuth, 1951, photograph

Figure 25: Opening spread of Robert Goodnough, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” *Art News*, May 1951, 38-39, photographs by Hans Namuth

Figure 26: Franz Kline standing infront of *Crow Dancer*, 1958, photograph

Figure 27: Opening spread of Paul O’Neil, “The Only Rebellion Around,” *Life*, November 30, 1959, 114-15

Figure 28: Miriam Dungan Cross, “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed,” *The Oakland Tribune*, November 29, 1959, 4C
Figure 29: Photomontage from prints by Jerry Burchard, Jay DeFeo, 1959, 8 x 11 inches

Chapter 3 ....................................................................................................................... 176-201

Figure 1: Portrait of Wally Hedrick, Jay DeFeo, 1959, photograph

Figure 2: Portrait of Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, 1959, photograph

Figure 3: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 7 ⅛ x 5 ⅞ inches

Figure 4: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 5 ⅜ x 4 ¼ inches

Figure 5: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 5 x 4 inches

Figure 6: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 3 x 4 inches

Figure 7: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 4 ½ x 4 ¼ inches

Figure 8: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 5 ⅝ x 5 ⅞ inches

Figure 9: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 5 x 5 inches

Figure 10: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 4 ¾ x 4 inches

Figure 11: Untitled gelatin silver print, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959, 5 x 4 inches

Figure 12: Untitled photograph, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959

Figure 13: Photograph of Jay DeFeo painting *The Rose* featured in *Creative America* (New York: Ridge Press, 1962), Burt Glinn, 1960

Figure 14: Jay DeFeo, Jerry Burchard, 1959, photograph

Figure 15: Photographs of Helen Frankenthaler and Grace Hartigan featured in the opening spread of “Women Artists in Ascendance,” *Life*, May 13, 1957, 74-75

Figure 16: Photographs of Nell Blaine, Joan Mitchell, and Jane Wilson featured in the concluding spread of “Women Artists in Ascendance,” *Life*, May 13, 1957, 76-77

Figure 17: Wallace Berman in Robert Fraser’s London apartment, 1967, photograph

Figure 18: *Cross (Factum Fidei)* (destroyed), Wallace Berman, 1956-57, mixed media

Figure 19: Untitled photograph, Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo, 1959
Figures 20 and 21: Untitled postcard, Wallace Berman, 1959, photomontage, ink and collage on board, 4 ½ x 6 ½ inches

Figure 22: Woodblock print of a kabbalistic palmistry diagram, reproduced in E.A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (1930; reprint, Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003)

Figure 23: Poster for the 3rd Los Angeles Film-Makers Festival, Wallace Berman, 1964, offset lithograph of a Verifax collage, approx. 16 x 16 inches

Figure 24: *Peyote Eyes, Larkspur*, Patricia Jordan, 1960, photograph

Figure 25: *Semina* (editions 1-9), conceived and edited by Wallace Berman with various contributors, 1955-64, mixed media limited edition artist’s publication, from 5 ½ x 3 ⅝ to 9 ½ x 8 inches

Figure 26: Untitled self-portrait, Scott Street, San Francisco, Wallace Berman, 1960, photograph

Figure 27: Detail of untitled correspondence for Wallace Berman, Jay DeFeo, 1965, mixed media, approx. 16 x 16 inches

Chapter 4

Figures 1-3: Stills from *The White Rose*, Bruce Conner, 1967

Figure 4: Contact sheet depicting Jay DeFeo’s studio, Jay DeFeo, 1976, 9⅝ x 8 inches

Figure 5: *After Image*, Jay DeFeo, 1970, acrylic and mixed media on paper, 10 x 13 inches

Figure 6: *The Rose*, Jay DeFeo, 1958-66, oil on canvas with wood and mica, 128 ¾ x 92 ¼ inches

Figure 7: *The Eyes*, Jay DeFeo, 1958, graphite on paper, 48 x 96 inches

Figure 8: *Tuxedo Junction*, Jay DeFeo, 1965/1972, Oil on paper mounted on three Masonite panels, 48 ¾ x 32 ½ x 3 ½ inches (size of each panel)

Figure 9: *Untitled (for B.C.)*, Jay DeFeo, 1975, photo-collage, 9 ¼ x 7 ¼ inches

Figure 10: Birthday card for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, early 1970s, gelatin silver print mounted on cardstock with charcoal pencil writing

Figure 11: Collaged postcard for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, c. 1973, gelatin silver print mounted on a postcard, approx. 4 ¼ x 5 ½ inches
Figure 12: Collaged postcard for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, c. 1973, torn paper currency mounted on a postcard, approx. 5 ½ x 4 ¼ inches

Figure 13: Card for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, early 1970s, gelatin silver print mounted on cardstock with ink writing

Figure 14: *Untitled (for B.C.)*, Jay DeFeo, 1973, gelatin silver photo-collage, 9 ¼ x 7 ¼ inches

Figure 15: *Untitled (for B.C.)*, Jay DeFeo, 1973, gelatin silver photo-collage

Figure 16: *Untitled (for B.C.)*, Jay DeFeo, 1973, gelatin silver photo-collage, 14 ½ x 7 inches

Figure 17: *The Jewel*, Jay DeFeo, 1959, oil on canvas, 120 x 50 inches

Figure 18: *Sound of One Hand Angel*, Bruce Conner, 1974, gelatin silver print photogram, 87 ¾ x 41 ¼ inches

Figure 19: *Sound of Two Hand Angel*, Bruce Conner, 1974, gelatin silver print photogram, 88 x 37 inches

Figure 20: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 ½ x 4 inches

Figure 21: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 ⅞ x 3 ¾ inches

Figure 22: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 ½ x 4 inches

Figure 23: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 ½ x 4 inches

Figure 24: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 x 4 inches

Figure 25: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, 9 x 4 inches

Figure 26: *Untitled (for B.C.)*, Jay DeFeo, 1973, collage of gelatin silver prints and the dial from Bruce Conner’s telephone mounted on a photomechanical reproduction, 10 ¾ x 4 ½ inches

Figure 27: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print, approx. 9 ½ x 4 inches

Figure 28: *Untitled*, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, gelatin silver photo-collage, 10 x 4 ½ inches
Figure 29: Contact sheet depicting DeFeo’s studio, Jay DeFeo, 1976, 9 ⅞ x 8 inches

Figure 30: Card for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, photocopy of gelatin silver prints mounted on an exhibition announcement with ink writing, 8 ½ x 11 inches

Figure 31: Card for Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, c. 1975-76, photocopy of collage, 8 ½ x 11 inches

Conclusion ...........................................................................................................................................267-279

Figures 1-10: Program for The San Francisco Giants’ 1964 season with collage additions, Jay DeFeo, c. 1965, 8 ½ x 10 inches

Figure 11: Wally Hedrick painting at 2322 Fillmore Street with The Rose in the background, Jerry Burchard, 1959, gelatin silver print

Figure 12: J., Me et Cat, Wally Hedrick, 1954, painting

Figure 13: Life Game, Wally Hedrick, 1957, painting
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is about the personal and creative relationships that formed around a single painting, Jay DeFeo’s The Rose (1958-66). Similarly, many people have generously supported and shaped this dissertation. I would first like to thank my advisor, Anne M. Wagner, for steering this project from conception to completion. At every step, she astutely sensed what I needed not only as a student but also as a person to keep this project moving forward. I am also immensely grateful to my committee members – Timothy Clark, Shannon Jackson, and Darcy Grigsby – who each provided vital encouragement and conceptual nourishment for this project. The following pages were greatly improved by their insights.

This project was generously funded by a Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Dissertation Fellowship in American Art, and by the University of California, Berkeley’s Graduate Division and History of Art Department. My research also benefited from the expert assistance of many librarians, including the staff of the Bancroft Library (especially Michael Kessler and Susan Synder), the National Archives, the Museum of Modern Art Archives, the San Francisco Art Institute Archives (especially Jeffery Gunderson), and the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art. I would like to extend special thanks to Jane Glover of the Katharine Hanrahan American Art Study Center at the De Young Museum for graciously accommodating my many requests to use the Archives of American Art’s microfilm collection. I am also grateful to Kathryn Wayne, Trina Lopez, and John Ceballos of Berkeley’s Art History and Classics Library for their bibliographic acumen.

During my research, many individuals and institutions kindly opened their collections to me. I would like to thank the staff of the Menil Collection, the Norton Simon Museum, the Oakland Museum of California, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art for giving me access to their artworks and files. I am very grateful to Dana Miller, Permanent Collection Curator at the Whitney Museum and curator of “Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective,” for making her expertise and the museum’s crucial resources readily available to me. Special thanks also to Jerry Burchard, Caroline Huber, Fred Martin, and Rebecca Solnit for sharing treasured pieces of the Fillmore circle’s history with me in the form of photographs, artworks, memories, and interviews. Finally, I would like to thank Leah Levy, Jane Green, and Michael Carr of The Jay DeFeo Trust for their exceptional support and encouragement. Leah was there from the beginning to the end of my research process, helping me discover new material in the Trust’s rich collection. I always came away from our meetings with a fresh perspective and renewed sense of excitement about DeFeo’s art.

I would never have finished this dissertation without the stellar support of fellow Berkeley graduate students. Elizabeth Bennett, Namiko Kunimoto, Aaron Hyman, Jordan Rose, Sarah Evans, Laura Richard, Tara McDowell, Vanessa Lyon, Erica Levin, Sarah Dennis, Aglaya Glebova, Elizabeth Quarles, and Luke Habberstad provided vital intellectual, emotional, and material reinforcement along the way. I especially benefited from regular meetings with a succession of dissertation writing groups. Karl Whittington, Christine Schick, and Elizabeth Gand (a.k.a., The Dominators) guided me through the difficult transition from research to writing with practical advice, compassion, and a healthy dose of zaniness. Sherry Ehya’s intelligence and calm kept me on course through the middle of the writing process. And, Jenny Sakai and Jacob Haubenreich diligently prodded me over the finish line. A big thanks to them all!

A wider ring of friends and family sustained my efforts at a distance from Berkeley. I would like to thank my “herd” – Kimberly Hiroto, Sarah Lau, Asia Szupinska, Katie Saxon,
Shruti Garg, Nura Sadeghpour, Gauri Goyal, Anne Power, Nicole Purcell Hersh, and Ryan Gardner – for the sanity and confidence that their many years of unwavering friendship has given me. I have also benefited in incalculable ways from the loving support of the growing Rainof clan: Alice and Alex Rainof, and Rebecca, Alex, and Anya Rainof-Mas. A big thank you also to my strong sister Emily for keeping me well stocked in produce and perspective during the darker days of dissertating. Furthermore, I thank my extraordinary parents, Sue and Jim Ferrell, who arrived in Los Angeles the same year as The Rose. I am grateful that they taught me the importance of education and gave me the means to pursue a very lengthy one. With love and reason, they helped me to recover the conviction to continue this project when I had lost it. Finally, I extend my gratitude to Edwin Harvey for getting me through each day – thankyouplease!
Introduction

In 1955 Jay DeFeo (1929-89) moved with her husband, Wally Hedrick (1928-2003), to 2322 Fillmore Street, a second-floor apartment in a nondescript building in the Upper Fillmore neighborhood of San Francisco (fig. 1). DeFeo had lived in the Bay Area since the age of two.¹ She attended high school in San Jose and earned both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in art from the University of California, Berkeley. Upon graduating in 1951, she became the first woman to receive the University’s prestigious Sigmund Martin Heller Travelling Fellowship, which she used to tour Europe. Soon after returning to Berkeley in 1953, she met Hedrick, who was attending the California College of Arts and Crafts, and married him the following year.

The couple joined the many, mostly young and Caucasian, artists who descended on the predominantly African-American Fillmore District in the mid-1950s, attracted by the cheap rents and world-class bebop clubs that lined Fillmore Street.² The recent arrivals founded exhibition collectives, such as the King Ubu and the 6 Galleries. Rather than court the city’s scarce collectors, these informal venues catered to the local artists’ community by throwing opening parties – where neighbors could socialize while viewing one another’s works – and hosting poetry readings, concerts, plays, and less easily categorized forms of avant-garde performance. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, this collection of artists constituted a bohemian enclave that was distinct from (and occasionally in conflict with) the better-known and more literary-minded Beats of North Beach. Despite their differences, the two circles mingled socially and artistically. For instance, DeFeo and many of her neighbors witnessed Allen Ginsburg’s legendary inaugural reading of “Howl” at the 6 Gallery in 1955. Both communities contributed to The San Francisco Renaissance, the flurry of innovative cultural activity that transpired in the city in the decades following World War II.

DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment building was a hub of the neighborhood’s artistic community. From the early 1950s until it was sold in 1965, the building hosted a rotating cast of creative tenants, including the artist Craig Kaufman (1932-2010), the painter couple Sonia Gechtoff (b. 1926) and James Weeks (1922-98), painter Joan Brown (1938-90) and her sculptor husband Manuel Neri (b. 1930), the poets Michael and Joanna McClure (b. 1932 and 1930, respectively), and, for a brief period, the artist Bruce Conner (1933-2008).³ DeFeo and Hedrick’s arrival helped solidify the residence’s reputation as a local cultural and social hot spot. They each set up a studio in the high-ceilinged flat and began to host raucous parties, which were

¹ Biographical facts about DeFeo’s early life cited in Judith Dunham, “Chronology” (Jay DeFeo and The Rose, ed. Jane Green and Leah Levy (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003), 155-68). The couple moved to 2322 Fillmore Avenue from their first home together, 734B Bay Street, San Francisco.
² DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment rested on the border between the largely African-American Fillmore neighborhood and the wealthy and mostly Caucasian Pacific Heights neighborhood. This intermediary zone has gone by many names, including Cow Hollow and the Union neighborhood. The influx of artists was simultaneous with a massive urban renewal project (authorized under the Housing Act of 1949) that razed thousands of homes in the Fillmore District and other neighborhoods in the Western Addition area of the city, displacing over 20,000, mostly African American, residents. The legacy of this “development” project is still evident in the Western Addition, where the highend boutiques that line the upper portion of Fillmore Street give way to housing projects in the lower Fillmore. For a more detailed history of the Western Addition see Rebecca Schoenthal, North Beach to Haight-Ashbury: Underground Artists and Community in 1950s San Francisco (Diss. U of Virginia, 2005), 145-58.
³ Conner briefly stayed with the McClures when he arrived from Kansas in 1957. He later moved a short distance away to 2365 Jackson Street with his wife, Jean.
attended by their neighbors and employees of the California School of Fine Arts, where Hedrick taught.\textsuperscript{4}

The couple never confined the making and housing of art to their studios. Stacked and hung canvases overflowed into the hallway of their apartment (fig. 2) and the communal back stairwell of their building (which, snapshots show, also collected excess revelers during their parties) (fig. 3). Hedrick likewise usurped the shared brick courtyard for welding his found-metal sculptures, including those made from empty beer cans, the detritus of local festivities (fig. 4).\textsuperscript{5} DeFeo’s early plaster sculptures punctuated the row of household items perched on the shelf above the kitchen sink (fig. 5), and she scrawled reminders to perform domestic chores (such as, “Water the plants!”) on her studio walls along with excerpts from poems by local writers that inspired her works.\textsuperscript{6} In sum, the spaces and even some of the materials that the residents of the 2322 Fillmore Street building dedicated to art and to life – to representation and to experience – bled together in keeping with San Francisco’s long bohemian tradition.

While the patterns of everyday life and interaction of the artists who lived in the Fillmore District are largely irretrievable, it is clear that the conditions under which they lived and worked bred a sense of community.\textsuperscript{7} That is, the artists’ close quarters and blurring of the domestic and the aesthetic staked their self-conceptions – their identities as individual creators – to their relationships with one another. DeFeo and Hedrick’s Christmas card from 1959 evidences the formation of a collective spirit among neighborhood artists (fig. 6). The glitter-bedecked flier exhibits Hedrick’s whimsical graphic style and predilection for wordplay. Typed, capitalized words are strung together with asterisks into the shape of a Christmas tree. The textual garlands recap the year’s events. The review begins with headline happenings (“SPUDNICK***BEETNICKS”) but quickly homes in on more local goings on. It elliptically recounts such neighborhood occurrences as DeFeo’s multiple exhibitions (“JAYGOT*FIMOUS”) and the McClures’ mention in \textit{Life} magazine (“MCLURESMADE*LIFE”).\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{4} Many of the artists who lived in the building had been students and/or were teaching at The California School of Fine Arts (CSFA). DeFeo described the couple’s massive holiday parties in an undated note written to accompany a cache of archived snapshots: “Enclosed are various photos of Christmas on Fillmore St. approx. 1956-63. We were clearly very festive during this season – as it was time when I put away work and did a lot of entertaining. (The parties of 300-400 people)” (Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).

\textsuperscript{5} Carlos Villa, a friend of Hedrick’s who was also his student at CSFA, later recalled how Hedrick acquired the materials for the sculptures: “We did a lot of beach parties at that time – Wally did not leave any of the cans – He recycled all of the cans and made some of this most memorable sculpture from crushing and welding the cans together – or stacking and welding them” (Carlos Villa, untitled notes about Wally Hedrick, Wally Hedrick file, San Francisco Art Institute Archives).

\textsuperscript{6} Photographs included in the Jay DeFeo papers of the Smithsonian Archives of American Art show that she also graffitied on her studio walls “Be Calm” and the line from Philip Lamantia’s untitled poem that inspired her massive drawing \textit{The Eyes} (1958): “Tell him I have eyes only for Heaven / as I look to you / Queen mirror / of the heavenly court.”

\textsuperscript{7} Archived photographs and interviews with the artists provide a shadowy sense of what life was like in the Fillmore neighborhood. Michael McClure’s journals, which are housed in the Bancroft Library, also paint a vivid, personal portrait of the community. His observations counterbalance the surviving snapshots, which generally capture moments of merriment, by describing instances of friction and strife, such as this example: “Final night-anger yest nite over Hedrick door ringing, and not able to easily pass it over. Vow of object-lesson revenge by ringing their bell when I pass it in leaving” (Michael McClure, Notebook 2: January-June, 1961, BANC MSS 2000/50 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

\textsuperscript{8} Paul O’Neil disapprovingly noted, in his famously scornful \textit{Life} article about the Beats, that Joanna McClure worked outside the home to support her poet husband (“The Only Rebellion Around,” \textit{Life}, November 30, 1959, 23).
individual Fillmore artists to form a single cohesive shape – an image of the community’s shared existence. While the artists who lived in the Fillmore District did not constitute a cohesive artistic movement (with a codified philosophy, aesthetic strictures, and institutions) like some avant-garde groups, as Brown observed, “we were a we.”

DeFeo’s most famous work, *The Rose* (1958-66), indicates the difficulty of characterizing the relationship between individual and group identity that developed among her friends (fig. 7). She began the oil painting in 1958, during a particularly prolific period in her practice. It resembled many of the works she was producing at the time in both its monumental scale and its style – specifically, the painting’s unexpected combination of expressionistic paint handling with a rigid, geometric composition and subdued coloring. However, she continued to craft *The Rose* long after the several months she usually required to produce a painting. Beginning in the winter of 1959, she worked on the canvas almost exclusively for the next six years. Over that period, the painting’s radial pattern mutated continuously as DeFeo repeatedly built up layers of mica-infused paint and carved the thick surface with knives and sandpaper (figs. 8-9). When she was done, the formerly illusionistic rays of the starburst had become sculptural peaks and valleys measuring, in some places, eleven inches deep. In her studio, the raking light from the bay window in which the painting was installed heightened the dramatic chiaroscuro of its corrugated surface (fig. 10). DeFeo and Hedrick’s eviction in 1965 forced her to halt production on *The Rose*, and the painting (which weighed over a ton) was extracted, via forklift, through a hole cut in her studio wall.

*The Rose* offers one example of how artistic production mutated in response to the particular conditions of the Fillmore neighborhood. DeFeo’s production of the work pushed Abstract Expressionism, which was still the dominant mode of painting in the United States when she began *The Rose*, to its limit point. She exaggerated the idiom’s fetishization of material and gesture to yield opposite results. The autonomous work became site-specific, wedded to the particular architecture and lighting of her studio. The purely optical became declaratively sculptural, in defiance of Clement Greenberg’s dictate of medium-specificity, and the spontaneous gesture became dilated and cyclical, woven into the recursive patterns of her daily routine. DeFeo’s distortion of the characteristic abstract-expressionist aesthetic and act could be seen as symptomatic of the blurring of art and life – of the spaces, activities, and

---

The elliptical quality of the allusions would have confirmed the insider status of the mailer’s recipients. Other members of the community mentioned in the letter include Fred Martin, Carlos Villa, and Bill and Joan Brown.

9 Quoted in Jack Foley, “O Her Blackness Sparkles,” in *The Beat Generation Galleries and Beyond* (Davis, CA: John Natsoulas Press, 1996), 170. The 6 Gallery and The Rat Bastard Protective Association (RBPA) were the most formal institutions founded by Fillmore artists and they were hardly models of organization. Members of the RBPA (including Conner, DeFeo, Hedrick, Brown, and Martin) met periodically in one another’s homes to socialize and show their new works. The group was as much a farce of an artists’ collective as it was a genuine association. Its tongue-in-cheek name plays on The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Conner jokingly codified the artists’ casual gatherings through parodic performances of collective identity (e.g., by handing out absurd membership cards, stamping members’ works with the RBPA seal of approval, etc.). For more information on the RBPA, see Kevin Hatch *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 44-47.

10 The few ambitious works other than *The Rose* that DeFeo produced from 1960 to 1966 include *Estocada* (1965), a massive painting that she made on paper mounted on her studio wall.

11 The paint surface of *The Rose* ranges from feathery strokes at the edges to flinty impasto at the center, and the hue is a lush monochrome with hints of creamy yellow and metallic violet.

12 After *The Rose* was removed from her studio, DeFeo continued to work on it for a few months at the Pasadena Art Museum, where it was first exhibited to the public.

experiences of the production of art and the reproduction of everyday life – that occurred within the Fillmore community.

Articulating how DeFeo’s creation of *The Rose* followed or diverged from typical accounts of abstract-expressionist authorship is more complicated. On the one hand, the protracted painting process isolated DeFeo. Her extended focus on a single work atrophied her ties to the larger art world given its constant demand for new works to show and sell. The changes that her painting process imposed on the living room of her apartment (where she moved the canvas approximately six months into its production) speaks to this narrative of withdrawal. A snapshot from 1955 portrays the interior (which, like its smiling occupant, is dressed up for the holidays) as a place for convivial leisure (fig. 11). A photograph of the same space from four years later, however, dispels every trace of sociability and relaxation (fig. 12). The massive canvas replaces the Christmas tree, shuttering the room from the outside world and reducing DeFeo to a diminutive silhouette. The radiant work dominates the room physically and perceptually, transforming it from a mundane domestic space into a studio-cum-temple – a site of solitary labor and contemplation. The later photograph represents DeFeo’s production of *The Rose* through the lens of Romantic genius, an artistic identity which was frequently assigned to abstract-expressionist painters. Cloistered in her studio-sanctuary, she is the lone visionary made holy and heroic by her complete devotion to art.

On the other hand, aspects of *The Rose*’s story contradict this familiar narrative of autonomous creation. Throughout its long production, the painting served as the site of many social and creative interactions between DeFeo and members of her circle. For example, when she decided to expand the painting by gluing it to a larger canvas, she invited her friends (including Kaufman and Conner) to a restretching party. One attendee, Carlos Villa, later recalled the event: “[T]here were at least 20 of us holding a part of the canvas . . . . We all were so loaded . . . it’s a wonder that the painting got mounted.” Villa’s recollection emphasizes the collective nature of this (mechanical) step in the painting’s production and the way it blended art making with social interaction. A damaged snapshot captures this moment of teamwork, which embedded the solitary artist within a collective: each reveler grabs an edge of the unwieldy painting, and, together, they carry it through a doorway, the paint-laden canvas sagging like a corpse between them (fig. 13). DeFeo’s friends not only pitched in to help with the laborious task of fabricating the colossal painting; they also created works with and about it. Paradoxically, as DeFeo’s painting process dragged on and increasingly resembled the Romantic ideal, the work became an emblem for her community, leading her friends to incorporate it into their works more and more. *The Rose* served as the backdrop for photo-shoots, was the subject of odes, and starred in a film. It was, in short, an important matrix for collaboration among Fillmore artists.

This dissertation explores the many questions about creative production, the artwork, and authorship raised by the simultaneously social and artistic interactions that took place around *The Rose*. I analyze selected works that DeFeo’s friends made with and about the painting, asking: What kinds of creativity did these works both image and enact? How, that is, do they depict DeFeo’s painting process, and how did the act of making them interact with her creative procedures? Specifically, what models of artistic practice did DeFeo and her friends develop by bringing the model of expressionist creation *ex nihilo* into dialogue with representational and appropriative modes of production? Furthermore, how did Fillmore artists understand the intertextual relationships between *The Rose* and the works that referenced it (through

---

14 Villa, untitled notes, SFAI Archives.
representation, formal allusion, material appropriation, etc.)? What conception of the artwork did these relationships (which often spanned disparate media, styles, techniques, scales, and makers) produce? Additionally, what types of authorship developed out of the creative exchanges that occurred around *The Rose*? What happened to artistic identity when the Romantic ideal of individual genius played out within a community – when self expression was spliced with more collective means of production? What, moreover, should we make of the remarkable fact that a work by a woman artist was at the center of a creative circle in mid-century America? How was she made to embody the decidedly masculine role of Romantic genius? Finally, how did the fact that these creative interactions occurred in the context of the artists’ interpersonal relationships and shared lives influence the models of creativity, the artwork, and the artist that they performed?

The network of intersecting artistic processes and works that orbited around *The Rose* displayed two distinctive characteristics that, I believe, most of the Fillmore circle’s diverse creative practices also possessed. First, instances of creative interaction occurred alongside the artists’ individual (and, often, more traditional) practices. Due to this duality, when artists collaborated, their methods were intertextual and sequential. Rather than multiple artists producing a single work, collaboration occurred across studios, moments, media, and works as artists cited and appropriated (both materially and symbolically) their friends’ works in their own. DeFeo, for example, made an elaborate card (fig. 14) for her friend and fellow Fillmore artist Wallace Berman (1926-76) by recycling a poster that Berman had sent her of his Verifax collage *Bouquet* (1964); she used the poster’s grid of repeated transistor radios as frames for her own collaged additions. Second, exchanges such as this example integrated the artists’ creative practices into their daily lives and sociability to a seemingly unprecedented degree. For instance, DeFeo’s creation of the epistolary appropriation for Berman blurred aesthetic and social decision making, the imperative of creative expression with the requirements of mundane, interpersonal communication. This project examines exchanges that involved *The Rose* to make more concrete the relational and personal dynamic that art practice assumed in the Fillmore neighborhood and to situate the proposals that it generated for creativity, the artwork, and authorship within the broader context of postwar American culture.15

The basic work of describing and contextualizing the Fillmore circle’s art practices remains to be done largely because of the challenges their practices propose to art-historical interpretation.16 These inherent difficulties are evident in the four book-length studies that offer sustained accounts of the Fillmore community and to which this dissertation is deeply indebted: Rebecca Solnit’s seminal *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (1990), Richard Cândida Smith’s detailed cultural history of modern California, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (1996), his recent follow-up project, *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century* (2009), and Rebecca

---

15 One factor that likely contributed to the development of the Fillmore circle’s peculiar style of collaboration was the lack of a local art market. The dearth of outside interest meant that the artists tended to circulate their works within the circle (usually through casual studio visits and shows at neighborhood galleries) before or in lieu of public display. The fact that the artists’ community also served as their primary audience most likely prompted reception and production to blend into a single process of exchange that played out in the context of their relationships to one another.

16 Other notable factors that have prevented Fillmore artists from entering the canon include the New-York centrism of postwar American art history and the purposely reclusive nature of many Fillmore artists (an issue which is taken up in chapter one).

One challenge that the Fillmore circle presents to scholarship is that their intertextual collaborations confound conventional understandings of authorship. Art history’s myopic fixation on the individual creator has hindered the development of methods and vocabulary for analyzing artistic exchanges.18 This disciplinary deficiency has, I believe, led scholars to provide only glancing analyses of Fillmore artists’ extensive use of collaboration. For although they wisely recognize the value of examining Fillmore artists together, both Solnit and Schoenthal, for example, provide sweeping views of art practice in the community at the expense of in-depth interpretation.19 My dissertation attempts to address this oversight by focusing on a few of the connections between different artists, works, and processes that their studies painstakingly map.

The Fillmore artists’ private exchanges also challenge art history’s bias against art that engages the social on a primarily interpersonal, rather than political, level. Such insular practices appear to undermine the discipline’s narrative of a heroic, oppositional avant-garde that, according to Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), attempts to fuse art and life by shocking the public and negating dominant social relations.20 Cultural products that do not fit into this account, such as DeFeo’s collaged letter to Berman, consequently trouble some of the most fundamental categories of art-historical interpretation. For example, they blur the distinction between artwork and document (museum and archive) by tainting history with biography, the aesthetic with mundane sociability, text with intimate context, and representation with everyday experience. While scholars have acknowledged the entanglement of creative practice and interpersonal sociality in the Fillmore community, they have left this important but difficult to interpret condition largely unanalyzed. Schoenthal, for example, characterizes the circle’s “mail art” as peripheral to their art practice,21 while Smith’s interpretation largely bypasses the interpersonal dynamics performed by the artists’ collaborations to fit their works into more macro-social frameworks, such as democracy.

In writing this dissertation, I wanted to develop a method that addressed the strains that the Fillmore circle’s collaborative and intimate art practices put on current frameworks of art-historical study. In other words, this project provided me with the opportunity to experiment with ways to adjust formal and contextual analysis to the special demands of group art practice. My approach follows two directions: 1) a reorientation of the object of analysis from the individual artwork to the “conversational context” of its production and reception, and 2) a case-study structure. First, instead of regarding each work as an isolated product made by an individual artist, I see it as a nexus within a dynamic network of intertextual and interpersonal relationships. Through study of individual works and archival research, I reconstruct the

---

18 This tendency is compounded in the field of postwar American art history by the period’s mythos of the heroic independent artist, who is best embodied by the rugged persona of Jackson Pollock.
19 *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle*, a travelling exhibition curated by Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna in 2005, took a similarly broad view of Berman’s network of artist friends.
21 Schoenthal, 317.
intricate web of intersecting processes and works produced through a series of collaborations involving *The Rose*.\(^{22}\) The resulting matrix of works and procedures becomes the subject of my investigation. I read the works together to analyze their interactions – how, through their materiality, media, temporality, etc., the works act on, with, and against each other. My formalist reading of the works also takes into account their “script of collaboration,” the network of interpersonal relationships and social gestures that suffused the works’ production and reception.

This approach was inspired, in a general way, by Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s influential theory of the dialogical nature of language. He posited that the meaning of an utterance is determined through its interaction with the contexts in which it is made and received.\(^{23}\) This interdependence gives every linguistic statement (from the grandest literary text to the most mundane word) the character of a dialog between two people – a situation in which one “cannot excise the rejoinder from this combined context made up of one’s own words and the words of another without losing its sense and tone.”\(^{24}\) Like the novels that Bakhtin analyzes in his classic essay “Discourse in the Novel” (1934-35), the Fillmore artists’ overtly appropriative and intertextual works exemplify the dialogical character of meaning production; each work is “an organic part of a heteroglot unity.”\(^{25}\) As many have noted, Bakhtin’s theory demands a shift in interpretive focus from the hermetic work to its interrelationships with a discursive field. My approach models one response to this demand within the discipline of art history.

My method was also influenced by studies of postwar American literary circles, such as Lytle Shaw’s *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (2006) and Michael Davidson’s *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Postwar Poetics* (2003).\(^{26}\) These recent scholarly contributions model ways to analyze both the exchange of works (here, texts) within tightly circumscribed creative circles and the formal effects of this private circulation – the ways in which a group’s cyclical production and reception can mold the rhetoric, tone, vocabulary, cadence, etc. of the poems it produces. Many of these studies also demonstrate non-reductive ways to weave together formalist and biographical frames of interpretation in order to tease out relationships between intertextuality and intersubjectivity, between poetic composition and community formation.\(^{27}\) The innovative approaches taken by these literary scholars were formative to my attempts to craft a method for addressing group practice in the plastic arts.

Necessity also played a role in developing my approach. *The Rose’s* ponderous weight and cumbersome materiality have prevented the Whitney Museum of American Art (which has owned *The Rose* since 1995) from regularly displaying it.\(^{28}\) The painting’s sequestration prompted me to shift my focus from the work itself to the relational surround of its production.

\(^{22}\) As the citations in this dissertation demonstrate, the lines of collaboration that linked the works and lives of Fillmore artists have, for the most part, been severed and scattered into individual collections, estates, and archives.


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 284.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.


\(^{28}\) I would like to thank Dana Miller, curator of the Whitney Museum’s permanent collection and of “Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective,” for graciously allowing me to view *The Rose* while it was still in storage. When I examined the painting, it was lying on its back surrounded by a protective metal cage.
By thus prompting me to regard it as a thing amongst other things, *The Rose* led me to cultivate a methodology that is, I believe, truer to the conditions in which DeFeo produced the painting.

The second aspect of my approach is the use of case studies. I organized my research into a series of cases because this structure allowed me to approach the Fillmore community’s art practices on their own terms. The delimited focus prescribed by the case study enabled me to zero in on specific instances of artistic exchange – to perform the kinds of detailed analysis that scholars have thus far neglected. At the same time, case-study organization prevented me from extrapolating overgeneralizing claims from these exchanges by representing each as a distinct example. While patterns emerge across the examples that suggest qualities shared by collaborations performed in the Fillmore community, no one exchange is made to stand in for what was a diverse field of artists and practices. Likewise, the associative character of case-study organization lets my argument weave back and forth between the Fillmore circle and its broader cultural context, suggesting specific relationships between them without fitting the former into the mold of the latter.

Using this method, I find that collaboration mutated in the subcultural context of the Fillmore community from an artistic strategy into a means of social performance, an activity that the artists used to construct and act out their relationships to one another. Specifically, I argue that their intertextual, exchange-based collaborations performed a dialogical model of authorship that opened the autonomous work, cloistered studio, and isolated artist championed in Cold-War America to negotiate more complex relationships between individual and collective.

The first two chapters each focus on a group exhibition from the late 1950s that included DeFeo’s artwork. They represent some of the few instances in which art produced within the Fillmore circle was presented to a wider audience. I examine the exhibition strategies that curators used to make DeFeo and her friends’ art accessible to the public. How did works produced in the Fillmore underground register within the dominant cultural frameworks of postwar America? What ideological work did the exhibitions bear their art to perform, and how did it submit to or resist these demands? Abstract Expressionism and the idea of the artist as individual, as it became attached to the style in the mid-1950s, serve as prominent cultural touchstones for both case studies. The first two chapters provide a long view (a kind of establishing shot) of DeFeo and the Fillmore circle within the context of postwar America to suggest how their practices related not only to the wider field of American art but also to contemporary debates about the place of the self in society.

Chapter one analyzes the representation of DeFeo’s work in The Museum of Modern Art’s “Sixteen Americans,” which opened in December 1959. It examines curator Dorothy Miller’s selection and arrangement of DeFeo’s works to discern the account of her artistic practice constructed by the exhibition. I find that Miller represented DeFeo as an abstract expressionist, an impression of her working method which differed dramatically from the one created by DeFeo’s show at the Fillmore neighborhood’s Dilexi Gallery, which Miller saw in July 1959. Through analysis of MoMA’s long-running “Americans” series, I argue that Miller’s

---

29 In other words, this structure makes it possible to decipher reciprocal relationships between the Fillmore neighborhood and its national context by representing the underground community as both distinct and embedded. It allows for the possibility that the artists’ exchanges had agency (that they creatively manipulated the period’s aesthetic norms and standards of association) without creating the illusion that they provided a utopian escape from the ideological debates and power dynamics of the nation state.

30 In the process, the first two chapters also sketch a portrait of the San Francisco art world circa 1960.
theme of artistic individualism obscured the relational dynamic of DeFeo’s practice visible in the San Francisco exhibition.

Chapter two examines the perplexing model of artistic identity and creativity constructed by “The Individual and his World,” a nationally touring exhibition organized by The San Francisco Art Bank in 1959 that contained works by several Fillmore artists. The show also included panels featuring photographs, taken by the San Francisco photographer Jerry Burchard, of the artists in their homes. Curator Fred Martin, who was DeFeo’s friend and often showed in Fillmore galleries, thought the photographs would make the exhibition’s abstract works more understandable by acquainting viewers with the personal environments in which they were made. Martin adopted this intermedial installation design from “17 Contemporary American Painters,” a show presented in the United States Pavilion at the Brussels World’s Fair of 1958 that included photo-panels by Hans Namuth. I compare Burchard’s photographs with Namuth’s to argue that, contrary to Martin’s claims, the installation design of “The Individual and his World” worked to preserve viewers’ incomprehension of the displayed artworks and, thereby, also preserved the privacy of the Fillmore underground.

The final two chapters zoom in from the national cultural stage to focus on the artistic practices of the Fillmore community, specifically on two instances of collaboration that involved *The Rose.* Chapter three examines a set of photographs that Berman shot of DeFeo in her studio in 1959. I explore the many contradictions in representation, gender, and authorship that the series incites by portraying DeFeo as both a God-like creator and an artist’s model. What accounts for the series’ construction of opposing identities for DeFeo? What model of artistic identity and creativity do the photographs suggest? Reading the photographs in light of the archival evidence of their production, I conclude that the series figures Berman’s ideal model of art making, which bridges autonomous creation and collective production.

Chapter four breaks with the narrow historical moment of the first three case studies. It rockets forward to the mid-1960s and early 1970s, during and after DeFeo’s move away from the Fillmore neighborhood and the disbandment of her creative community. What happened to the group’s distinctive style of collaboration after its members dispersed? I explore this question by examining both DeFeo’s practice of recycling her old works to create anew after *The Rose* and the epistolary and artistic exchanges that grew out of her and Conner’s efforts to restore the painting. In these projects, DeFeo continued the dialogical patterns of making that she practiced in the Fillmore community but she framed them in terms of memory and play. I argue that this transformation – which added a sense of time and loss to her art practice – reflects the fact that DeFeo’s primary interlocutor was no longer her neighbors but an imagined version of *The Rose,* from which she was separated.

---

31 I realize that the relationship between the two parts of my dissertation could be read in many other (non-cinematic) ways: as a separation between public and private, viewing and making, product and process, and gallery and studio. These interpretations are incorrect, however, since my analysis of the Fillmore community undermines these binaries by showing the interdependence of their terms (e.g., that privacy is a concept constructed in the public sphere).

32 As I explain in the conclusion of this dissertation, I was not able to include an analysis of *The Rose* itself in this study because the canvas was inaccessible when I was conducting my research.
Figure 1
Digital photograph of 2322 Fillmore Street as it looks today
Google Maps
https://maps.google.com/maps
Figure 2
View from the hallway into the kitchen of 2322 Fillmore Street, Wally Hedrick’s painting *Peace* (1953) and an early version of Jay DeFeo’s painting *The Veronica* (1957) hang on the wall. Photographer unknown c. 1955
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 3
View of the communal stairwell leading from 2322 Fillmore Street
Jerry Burchard
1959
Gelatin silver print
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 4
Wally Hedrick welding in the courtyard of 2322 Fillmore Street
Jerry Burchard
1959
Gelatin silver print
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 5
Jay DeFeo washing dishes in 2322 Fillmore Street
Photographer unknown
December 1961
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 6
Christmas card to Dorothy Miller
Wally Hedrick
1959
Mimeograph print, glitter, postage stamp and mark
8 ½ x 11 inches
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: The Dorothy C. Miller Papers, I.15.i
Figure 7
The Rose
Jay DeFeo
1958-1966
Oil with wood and mica on canvas
10 ¾ x 7 ½ x 1 feet
Digital reproduction courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 8
Photograph of *The Rose*
c. 1960
**Figure 9**
Photograph of *The Rose*  
c. 1963  
Figure 10
DeFeo in her studio
Photographer unknown
c. 1961
Figure 11
Jay DeFeo in the living room of 2322 Fillmore Street
Photographer unknown
c. 1956
Figure 12
Jay DeFeo in her studio at 2322 Fillmore Street
Jerry Burchard
1959
Gelatin silver print
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 13
Jay DeFeo’s friends carrying *The Rose* to its new frame
Photographer unknown
c. December 1959
Figure 14
Detail of untitled correspondence for Wallace Berman
Jay DeFeo
1965
Mixed media (oil crayon, collaged printed material, photographs, tissue paper, stamps, and masking tape on a poster for the 3rd Los Angeles Film-Makers Festival)
Approximately 16 x 16 inches
Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Chapter 1

“S.F. Paintings in N.Y. Exhibit”:

The legibility of Jay DeFeo’s artistic practice in “Sixteen Americans”

The Shape of Things to Come

A sense of occasion has clung to the exhibition “Sixteen Americans” for half a century, since it opened at the Museum of Modern Art on December 16, 1959. From the start, critics treated the show as a portent of artistic practice in the impending decade. “What hints does the present show give of the shape of things to come?” asked New York Times reviewer Stuart Preston, momentarily abandoning judgment for prognostication. Later chroniclers have sanctioned this initial response by portraying the exhibition as telescoping the transition from the high modernism of the immediate postwar years to the explosion of postmodernist practices that would dominate the second half of the century. “Sixteen Americans” has, in other words, been commonly viewed as a weighty pivot around which the narrative of postwar American art took one of its most dramatic turns. Such accounts read curator Dorothy C. Miller’s selections as a prescient roster of post-abstract-expressionist trends: for Ellsworth Kelly read Hard Edge Painting, for Robert Rauschenberg read Pop, for Frank Stella read Minimalism, and for Jasper Johns read Conceptualism.

The significance of Jay DeFeo’s presence in the exhibition, like her place in the narrative of postwar American art, has proved more difficult for scholars to divine. What little has been written on the San Francisco artist’s participation in “Sixteen Americans” has focused on her decision to withhold her masterwork The Rose (1958-64). DeFeo denied Miller’s request to show the monumental painting – on which she would continue to work almost exclusively for 34


35 The following writings briefly address DeFeo’s participation in “Sixteen Americans” in the manner summarized above: Rebecca Solnit, Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 75-76; Smith, Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 118-19; Carter Ratcliff, “Romance of The Rose,” Modern Painters, Spring 2003, 92; and Rebecca Schoenthal, North Beach to Haight-Ashbury: Underground Artists and Community in 1950s San Francisco (Diss. U of Virginia, 2005), 233-36. Bill Berkson gives a more extended meditation on the exhibition in his essay “Without The Rose: DeFeo in Sixteen Americans,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, ed. Jane Green and Leah Levy (Berkeley: U of Calif. Press, 2003), 43-64. He uses the exhibition as a jumping off point to situate DeFeo’s work within international art trends in the late 1950s. Though he mentions a few of her works from “Sixteen Americans” in passing, he admittedly constructs most of his comparisons between DeFeo and her contemporaries around The Rose (44). In The Modern Moves West, Smith uses “Sixteen Americans” to contrast the motivating force behind artistic practice on the West Coast, where art was made “to challenge and transform the world,” and the East Coast, where art was made to investigate the properties of art (110-20). Unlike previous writers, Smith does not focus on The Rose. Like their accounts, however, his is generalizing and ignores DeFeo’s works that were included in “Sixteen Americans.”
the next six years – on the grounds that it was still in progress, but she permitted it to be reproduced in the catalog as an unfinished piece (fig. 1). 36 Scholars have interpreted the artist’s retention of The Rose – along with the fact that she and her husband, Wally Hedrick, who was also featured in the show, did not travel to New York to attend the opening – as emblematic of the unique priorities of San Francisco artists in the postwar period. They read her reserved participation in the show as indicative of a bohemian understanding of art “as personal ritual and spiritual commitment” – of creativity “unfettered by outside concerns like publicity or financial success.” 37 In this narrative, The Rose becomes a symbol of the unwieldy temporal and material dimensions that artistic practice assumed in the Bay Area where, removed from market pressures of “production,” it was driven by “idealism and obsession.” 38

This account of DeFeo’s participation in “Sixteen Americans” is persuasive because its truth seems intuitive and even poetic. With the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult not to see “the eruptive, glowering near-presence” of The Rose in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog as a sign that her artistic practice was not fully legible within the frameworks for reception that MoMA provided. 39 Its liminal appearance in the exhibition seems to predict, poignantly, the way her practice and career path would veer out of synch with the New York art world during her six-year odyssey creating The Rose. Moreover, the exhibition’s significance and the fact that it was one of the few occasions on which members of the Fillmore circle showed in New York make it extremely tempting to inflate the couple’s involvement in “Sixteen Americans” into an allegory of the San Francisco art world colliding with its East Coast counterpart. 40

The traits that make this interpretation appealing, however, also make it suspect as a rational argument. Ironically, the exhibition’s momentousness appears to have deflected scholarly attention away from the exhibition itself – away, that is, from the works it contained and the facts of its construction. 41 The literature on DeFeo in “Sixteen Americans” shows that two distinct but generally coupled reactions to the exhibition’s sense of occasion are responsible for generating this lacuna. 42 First, the show’s transitional character has led writers to read the exhibition through the future of artistic practice that it appears to have predicted (e.g., The Rose’s extended production), giving their accounts a distorting temporal vertigo. Second, the exhibition’s significance has prompted scholars to use “Sixteen Americans” to point to global claims (e.g., about the nature of artistic practice in San Francisco versus New York) rather than to study the exhibition in its own right; hence, the exhibition has played a primarily symbolic role.

36 Jay DeFeo, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, October 19, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k. As the caption under the catalog reproduction shows, The Rose was known as Deathrose at the time of “Sixteen Americans.” Like its title, the painting changed significantly over the six years of its production, so the finished work diverges from its depiction in this catalog.

37 Quoted from Solnit, 83 and Schoenthal, 234. Lucy Lippard gives a different reason for DeFeo’s lukewarm involvement in “Sixteen Americans,” viewing it as “a classic case of ‘fear of success,’ as identified by feminist psychologists” (“Transplanting The Rose,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, 57).

38 Solnit, 83.

39 Description of The Rose in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog quoted from Berkson, 44.

40 Bruce Conner and Wallace Berman’s inclusion in William Seitz’s The Art of Assemblage show in 1961 is the only other instance of members of DeFeo’s circle showing at MoMA, or any other high-profile New York exhibition, in this period. However, several Fillmore artists, including Conner and Joan Brown, were represented by New York galleries.

41 I use the word “momentous” here because it captures the temporal dimension of the significance that commentators attributed to “Sixteen Americans.” The fact that the exhibition occurred on the cusp of a new decade, in other words, made it both “of moment” and “of great weight, consequence, or importance” (OED).

42 Another obvious culprit is the inordinate focus on The Rose in DeFeo scholarship.
role in accounts of DeFeo’s art just as it has in broader narratives of postwar American art. In its most concrete and legible form, this deflection manifests in the literature as a fixation on what was missing from the exhibition – specifically, The Rose and the artist’s person. Rather than analyzing evidence from “Sixteen Americans,” scholars have, for the most part, crafted their conclusions by projecting into these absences. Their projections assign to DeFeo motives for withholding herself and The Rose from the exhibition that fit the writers’ narratives about the fundamental difference of artistic practice in San Francisco better than they fit the few fragments of evidence – which derive mostly from the artist’s correspondence with Miller – that indicate how she was thinking and feeling about her New York debut at the time.43

This chapter examines the contents of this critical blind spot. It attempts to describe and interpret Miller’s selection and display of DeFeo’s works in “Sixteen Americans.” I investigate the exhibition’s representation of DeFeo. I use the term “representation” to signify both the curatorial process – the decisions made by Miller and other agents at MoMA which determined the selection and installation of DeFeo’s works – and the resulting accounts this process created of the artist and her practice – the stories which MoMA’s display told about her artistic identity and production process. My characterization of curation as a signifying process follows recent critical theorizations of exhibition practice.44 The term is intended to convey the assumption that exhibitions actively construct (as opposed to passively conduct) meaning. This account of “Sixteen Americans” is founded on the idea that the curatorial process produces “operations and frameworks for the production and circulation of meaning” and, in so doing, creates a context of display that circumscribes the possibilities for perception and knowledge that a given artwork can provide.45 By controlling the “physical and conceptual frame through which the work is perceptible to the public,” to quote Bruce Ferguson, “exhibitions establish the historical conditions of its visibility.”46 This chapter asks: How were DeFeo and her artistic practice

---

43 Scholars (specifically, Solnit 76-77, Smith (1995) 119, and Schoenthal 234-35) have used DeFeo’s and Hedrick’s retrospective reflections on their participation in “Sixteen Americans,” expressed during interviews with Paul Karlstrom in the 1970s (Oral history interview with Jay DeFeo, 1975 June 3-1976 Jan. 23 and Wally Hedrick, 1974 June 10-24, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution), to support their claims that the artists did not attend the opening because they were unconcerned with public and commercial success. Thus far, writers have ignored DeFeo’s correspondence with Miller, which provides both a contemporary window onto the artist’s thinking and a more complex and ultimately elusive account of her motivations. The letters record DeFeo’s anxiety over her self-presentation in the exhibition catalog and the representation of her works in the show. Her attitude towards her New York debut, that is, comes across as anything but nonchalant. Though DeFeo chose not to show The Rose in “Sixteen Americans,” she harbored great public ambitions for the work; she repeatedly wrote to Miller of her desire that the painting eventually make its way into MoMA’s collection (DeFeo, letters to Miller, August 18, 1959 and undated, c. January 1960). Also, from her letters it appears that the main reason the couple did not attend the opening was because they could not afford to travel to the East Coast (Ibid., December 14 and 31, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k). The detachment of previous scholarship from these facts, however scant they may be, has made it an ideal breeding ground for myth. For example, retellings of DeFeo and Hedrick’s infamous decision frequently include the apocryphal (that is, never cited) story that the couple, in a gesture of naïve generosity, gave away their free plane tickets to New York (Lippard 57, Schoenthal 235, and Smith (2009) 111). This questionable detail has staying power because it underscores the artists’ allegiance to communal bohemian values and personal ideals over the commercial and career success embodied by the New York art world.


46 Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics,” 179.
visible in “Sixteen Americans”? By what means and to what ends did MoMA construct this version of the artist and her work? Specifically, what ideological work did Miller’s curation of DeFeo’s art gear it to perform? What “degrees and kinds of knowledge” about the artist and her practice did this “ideological frame of reference” enable and what did it foreclose?47

To reveal MoMA’s presentation of DeFeo as an actively constructed representation and to discern the decisions that shaped it, I compare “Sixteen Americans” to DeFeo’s earlier, solo exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery, a show which Miller saw during her scouting mission to the Bay Area in the summer of 1959. The Dilexi show provides solid ground from which to gain perspective on MoMA’s representation of the artist for two reasons. First, with a few notable exceptions, it contained the pool of DeFeo’s works that were available to Miller and can thus provide insight into the curator’s selection criteria. Second, it presents an alternative arrangement of her works, one which Miller knew (indeed, a diagram that the curator drew of the show’s layout survives in her archive)48 and which DeFeo appears to have designed. The Dilexi show thus offers a historically relevant comparison which can help clarify the specificity of MoMA’s installation of DeFeo’s works and the modes of spectatorship it encouraged. Using installation shots, I describe the impressions of DeFeo’s artistic practice that each exhibition encouraged and compare these to detect the limits of her practice’s legibility in “Sixteen Americans.”

By now it should be clear that my investigation zeros in on one facet of MoMA’s representation of DeFeo – its depiction of her artistic practice. My analysis, then, is based on the belief that the process of curation often generates narratives of artistic practice in particular. (Other narratives – for example, about stylistic development or cultural significance – may be generated as well.) It assumes, in other words, that the way a work is displayed influences and delimits the viewer’s understanding of its production. Shows that feature more than one work per artist, whether they be solo exhibitions or multi-gallery group exhibitions like “Sixteen Americans,” not only shape accounts of the artist’s process, of the sequence of procedures he or she uses to produce single works; they construct stories of the artist’s practice, of the way his or her aesthetic ideas and actions unfold across works.49 Though some exhibitions (such as chronologically-organized retrospectives) overtly proffer definitive narratives of artistic practice, most (including the two under study here) subtly convey more open-ended impressions. The selection and arrangement of an artist’s works suggest certain types and degrees of relationship between them and prompt viewers to engage them in specific ways (to adopt particular patterns of viewing, for example). In so doing, exhibitions allow and, in some instances, even encourage viewers to form assumptions, by both intellectual and phenomenological means, about the course, dynamic, tempo, and driving principle of the artist’s practice.

Briony Fer’s supposition that the history of artistic practice is inextricably and complexly intertwined with the history of display practice informs this understanding of the exhibition’s operations. As she demonstrates in her book The Infinite Line, changes in creative processes frequently give rise to new conventions for installation and modes of beholding; in turn, habits of

47 T.J. Clark, “Courbet The Communist and The Temple Bar Magazine,” Block, 1981, 36. My formulation of all of these questions is indebted to Clark’s essay.
48 MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.j.
49 This definition of artistic practice is admittedly somewhat idiosyncratic. Over the last decade “artistic practice” has become a popular – some would claim, over-used – term. Though its definition is fluid, the phrase is generally used to describe creative labor or, more specifically, approaches to aesthetic production that value process over product (see, for example, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era (Berkeley: U of California P, 2009)).
reception codify, often in obscure and complex ways, ideologies of artistic production.\textsuperscript{50} Fer shows that exhibitions in the postwar period were a primary means of shaping public understandings of creativity – of the nature of artistic action, the identities it models, and the significance of these within the cultural imaginary. The following explores one example of this complex and often ambiguous relationship between the moments of production and reception and their accompanying practices.

Exhibitions are notoriously evasive objects of study. Each is a composite physical site that gives rise to a vast array of individual embodied experiences. They are also temporary events; as such, each leaves behind, at best, only a handful of fragmentary textual and visual evidence. Historians of exhibitions, then, face the uncomfortable task of studying an object that is not only complex but vanished – a methodological dilemma which Peggy Phelan famously labeled “the ontology of performance.”\textsuperscript{51} Certainly, the smattering of installation shots, floorplans, catalogs, letters, and reviewers’ descriptions that pertain to “Sixteen Americans” and the Dilexi show license me to make only partial and tentative claims about the physical and spatial character of each exhibition, the possible experiences and ideas each enabled, and the intentions of Miller and DeFeo. The limited conclusions my approach renders are, in many ways, more circumscribed than the grand statements about the nature of artistic practice in San Francisco that previous scholars have drawn from DeFeo’s participation in “Sixteen Americans,” and my method is more archaeological. Shifting focus from the presumed \textit{invisibility} of DeFeo’s practice in “Sixteen Americans” to the conditions of its \textit{visibility} allows me to ground discussion in factual specifics, however partial they may be. I conclude that the relational dynamic of DeFeo’s practice could not be adequately conveyed in “Sixteen Americans” and that this failure lay, in part at least, with the show and its particular biases. While this finding cannot support any definitive claims about the distinctiveness of artistic practice in postwar San Francisco, it is suggestive, and the remainder of this dissertation explores its implications from several points of view.

\textit{A MoMA Curator Visits the Fillmore-Union Montparnasse}

When DeFeo’s solo show opened at the Dilexi on July 6\textsuperscript{th} 1959, the gallery was located at 1858 Union Street, less than a five minute walk down the hill from DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment. James Newman, the Dilexi’s independently wealthy director, had relocated the fledgling gallery from the North Beach neighborhood to the Fillmore District earlier that year to capitalize on the area’s thriving underground art scene.\textsuperscript{52} The neighborhood was no stranger to galleries. The mid and late 1950s had seen a handful of small venues – most notably, the King Ubu Gallery, the 6, the Spatsa Gallery, and the East/West Gallery – open along Fillmore Street and its tributaries.\textsuperscript{53} These sites catered to the immediate creative community; they showed mainly area artists to neighborhood audiences. Though most of the galleries – including collectives such as King Ubu and the 6 – were nominally commercial enterprises, they generated

\textsuperscript{50} Briony Fer, \textit{The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism} (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2004). Fer’s book is an appropriate touchstone for this study because it covers the same timeframe, the late 1950s through the early 1960s.


\textsuperscript{52} See Schoenthal, 145-58, for further geographic and socio-historical information on the Fillmore District in the 1950s.

\textsuperscript{53} Information about the Fillmore gallery scene from \textit{The Beat Generation Galleries and Beyond} (Davis, CA: John Natsoulas Gallery, 1996) and Schoenthal.
few sales and little public interest beyond the local scene. Their casual, bohemian atmosphere led the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s Art Editor, Alfred Frankenstein, to dub the area, somewhat snidely, “The Fillmore-Union Montparnasse.”

While the Dilexi’s compact storefront space resembled those of its predecessors, its aesthetic and tenor were notably new. Newman had been involved with the innovative Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles and wanted to provide San Francisco’s avant-garde artists with the opportunity to show in a similarly professional environment. With its smooth white walls, indirect lighting, and carpeted floors, the Dilexi sported a sleeker, more polished look than its ramshackle neighbors. Likewise, Newman shed the characteristic operational informality of the Fillmore venues by instituting regular business hours and a full-time staff. He hoped these changes would make the gallery inviting to a wider public. Though sales remained largely elusive, the Dilexi became a regular attraction for local and visiting dealers, museum professionals (such as Miller), and patrons (such as Patrick Lannan, the Chicago-based financier and DeFeo’s early supporter, who first encountered her work at the gallery). DeFeo was certainly aware of the Dilexi’s difference; in a 1976 interview, she recalled thinking of her solo exhibition there as her “first grown-up show.”

Despite its sophisticated, commercial face, the Dilexi continued the spirit of the local cooperatives by giving artists a great deal of control over the promotion and installation of their shows. DeFeo appears to have been in charge of arranging her exhibition, though it is unclear who determined which works to display. Likewise, while the Dilexi drew a broader clientele than other area galleries, the majority of its visitors were still members of the community. It is very likely that most of the people who saw DeFeo’s show were already familiar, to some degree, with her work. One of the few surviving photographs of her exhibition captures the Dilexi’s hybrid nature (fig. 2). It depicts the artist and two unidentified men (most likely, Newman and his assistant) presumably taking a break from installing the show. We see the trio through the gallery’s plate-glass window and the snippets of urban landscape (car, lamppost, power line) reflected in it. Perched on the deep sill of the recessed window, DeFeo slouches against the gallery wall, her face upturned in a broad smile. She exudes easy informality—an impression no doubt enhanced by the beer cans and potato chip bags strewn before her. The gallery’s double-ovoid logo, which wrapped around the window’s corner, hovers above and to her right. With its stylish, minimalist design, the sign is an incongruous label for the relaxed scene behind it. By superimposing a slick symbol of the Dilexi’s commercial aspirations and

---

56 “The Dilexi Years and Beyond,” *The Dilexi Years*, 41. The Dilexi certainly had more “class,” as DeFeo put it, than the venue of her first solo exhibition—Knute Stiles’ legendary and consummately bohemian coffee house, The Place.
57 Ibid., 32-49. In this conversation between Newman and former artists from his stable, DeFeo makes a series of remarks indicating that she was in charge of designing and hanging her exhibition. Other artists also describe Newman soliciting their input about the installation and promotion of their shows, practices which Newman confirms in his oral history interview.
58 I hypothesize that this photograph, along with the other surviving shots of her exhibition, were taken during the show’s installation because the order of the panels of DeFeo’s diptych, *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* (1958), which is partially visible behind the standing man, does not appear to be set; they are reversed in another shot.
national pretensions over evidence of its artist-centric focus and local allegiance, the photograph literally collapses markers of the gallery’s dueling identities.59

When Miller visited the gallery a few weeks after this photograph was taken, she encountered a display of fourteen works by DeFeo (diagramed in fig. 3).60 All of the pieces were made after she and Hedrick moved to the Fillmore neighborhood in 1955. Most dated from the last two years. In fact, the show included the majority of her ambitious works from 1957 and 1958, both of which were highly productive years for the artist.61 Its selection, then, was inclusive almost to the point of comprehensiveness. The works lined the gallery’s back and side walls and spilled into the rear office. DeFeo’s two photomontages, Blossom (1958) and Applaud the Black Fact (1958), hung back to back on a partial wall that appears to have stood about midway down and perpendicular to the gallery’s eastern wall.62 The partition’s mid-tone gray matched the gallery’s wall-to-wall carpet but contrasted with its white walls and ceiling.

Reflected ceiling lamps supplemented the natural light from the plate-glass façade, complete with clerestory, and two back windows (one in the office and one in the gallery, which looked onto the storeroom).

At the Dilexi show, Miller viewed most of DeFeo’s works that she would come to know before making her selections for “Sixteen Americans.” However, she also accessed a handful of works from other sources. Newman showed the curator three works which were stored at the gallery, Apparition (1958), Origin (1956), and Ascension (1959); the last two were excluded from the solo show because they were slated for upcoming group exhibitions.63 When she called at the Dilexi, Miller had already seen DeFeo’s painting The Veronica (1957) in Artists under Thirty-Five at UCLA’s Dickson Art Gallery earlier that year,64 and she would soon see more

59 In its hybridity, the Dilexi embodies the transition of the San Francisco art world from underground bohemia to market-centered professionalism, a sea change which occurred in the early 1960s.
60 I created this diagram of the Dilexi installation from the sketch Miller drew of it on the back of the exhibition pricelist, and then used installation shots and a more deliberate floor-plan of the gallery drawn by Jeremy Anderson (The Dilexi Gallery Papers, 1958-1970, AAA) as correctives. I constructed the diagram of DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” solely from installation shots. At this point in my research, I have not been able to locate a floor-plan of the exhibition. Though MoMA’s photographic documentation of the show is thorough and well-organized, it does not provide enough information to reconstruct the gallery completely. It is possible that the two walls containing DeFeo’s drawings did not line up, as I show them to in the diagram, but met at a perpendicular angle. This arrangement would give the gallery a fourth wall, the existence of which remains a mystery in the diagram. Given the views that exist of the galleries surrounding DeFeo’s, however, it seems more likely that the walls were arranged as I have them in the diagram. The installation shots reveal that several of the galleries in “Sixteen Americans” were not completely enclosed by four walls. I believe DeFeo’s gallery was one of these. Unfortunately, I do not know the dimensions of each exhibition space at this time. Figures 4 and 5 list the titles and other relevant information about the works included in both exhibitions and should be used to decipher the diagrams. The thumbnail images of the works, like the diagrams, are not to scale.
61 By “ambitious” I mean large and heavily worked. Of DeFeo’s works from 1957 and 1958 that match this description, only one – an untitled drawing from 1957, now owned by Mills College – was excluded from the Dilexi show.
62 It is unclear from the installation shots if the two walls were attached. I suspect they were not since they do not touch on Miller’s diagram. One photograph of the installation reveals a large American flag draped vertically down the backside of the partition with Applaud the Black Fact hung over it. The flag’s appearance in the exhibition is startling. The reasons for and duration of its presence are unknown. I hypothesize that the flag was hung in honor of Independence Day, which occurred during the show’s installation, and was removed before the opening. Due to these ambiguities, I have chosen to leave the flag out of my current description and analysis of the installation.
63 I deduce that Newman showed Miller these three works at the Dilexi because she wrote their titles and notes about them on the exhibition’s pricelist.
64 “Chronology,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, 157.
works at DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment/studio, which she visited later in her trip at the urging of Fred Martin, the couple’s friend and Administrator of the San Francisco Art Bank. Though the exact inventory of DeFeo’s studio at the time is unknown, Miller definitely came across The Rose and its pendent, The Jewel (1958-59). On the basis of these encounters, she selected Origin, The Veronica, and three large mixed-media works from the Dilexi show, Persephone (1957), Death Wish (1958), and Daphne (1958), to feature in “Sixteen Americans.” “I assume you had reasons for excluding what you did in the show – or at least a preference for the ones you indicated,” DeFeo wrote to Miller, approximately one month after their initial meeting, in a letter detailing the arrangements for shipping her works to MoMA. Her statement should be read as more deferential than confrontational given the general tone of her correspondence with Miller, in which she treats the curator as a mentor and confidant, frequently asking her for professional advice and confessing her hopes and insecurities about her career. The passage indicates that Miller did not consult the artist when selecting her works. It also implies that DeFeo found the curator’s choices opaque and, possibly, befuddling, suggesting that they diverged from the artist’s own valuation of her works.

As virtual unknowns in the New York art world, DeFeo and Hedrick were perfect candidates for “Sixteen Americans.” The show was the latest in MoMA’s periodic series on contemporary art in the United States, which primarily served to introduce new talent. The exhibitions provided the Museum with opportunities to shape public opinion about new directions in art and to bolster their collection with choice works by artists on the brink of stardom. They also helped build the institution’s financial and cultural capital since the exhibited works were for sale. During these shows the Museum became, in essence, an elite commercial gallery catering to its wealthy patrons, trustees, and board members.

65 DeFeo, letter to Miller, undated, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
66 Miller chose more of DeFeo’s works to ship to the Museum than were eventually hung in the show. In addition to the five works featured in “Sixteen Americans,” she requested Young Bird of Paradise (c. 1957), Applaud the Black Fact, The Eyes (1958), Tear (1959), and Ascension (1959). It is unclear if all the works she had shipped were potential candidates for installation, which was ultimately determined by the gallery’s parameters, or if she knew ahead of time which works she would display and wanted the others simply for potential sales. Whatever the reasons, it appears to have been a common practice for her. My analysis does not factor in this aspect of Miller’s selection process because its rationale is unclear and because it did not affect the impression of DeFeo’s practice that the exhibition conveyed.
67 DeFeo, letter to Miller, August 18, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
68 In a 1976 interview with Karlstrom, DeFeo recalled thinking it “rather strange” that Miller did not exhibit The Eyes given that DeFeo considered it “one of the major pieces in the [Dilexi] show” (AAA). The artist’s esteem for the drawing is evident from the show’s announcement, which features the work.
69 Background information on the “Americans” series from Zelevansky. The “Americans” exhibitions were also supposed to showcase under-represented older artists, but only a small fraction of participants fit this profile. Of the sixteen artists in the 1959 show, for example, only Louise Nevelson and Albert Urban fell under this category. Nevelson and DeFeo were the only female artists in “Sixteen Americans.”
70 The explosion of commercial galleries in New York City in the mid-1950s through the early 1960s threatened to make the museum a redundant venue for discovering new talent and generating sales. Miller was highly conscious of the gallery’s menacing presence when she organized “Sixteen Americans.” In 1958, she appealed to Barr to move up the exhibition’s date for fear that the series was falling behind the rapid pace of the city’s commercial art world (Zelevansky, 78).
71 For example, the Museum Committee purchased four works by Johns at the beginning of “Sixteen Americans” (Ibid., 80).
72 Forty-seven of the ninety-seven works shown in “Sixteen Americans” were purchased. The exhibition’s clients included Philip Johnson, who purchased one of Hedrick’s works, and Mrs. David Rockefeller, who considered buying Origin (MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.b).
pitched the exhibitions as educational events that exposed the general public to the latest avant-garde art, but the series also participated heartily in the mechanics of the city’s burgeoning critic-dealer system. Its target audience consisted of collectors and art world professionals, such as gallerists and critics — those, in short, who had the most stake in deciphering the latest trends and discovering the freshest talents.

When Miller took charge of the series in 1942, she established the installation principle of allotting each artist his or her own gallery to create “a series of small one-man shows within the framework of a large exhibition.” She repeated this design for “Sixteen Americans,” using plywood walls to divide up the Museum’s expansive temporary exhibition space into a warren of partially enclosed areas. Miller arranged the five works in DeFeo’s gallery (diagramed in fig. 6) in a kind of horseshoe with the two oil paintings, Origin and The Veronica, facing each other on opposite walls and the three slender, mixed-media on paper mounted on canvas works (which I will henceforth refer to as “drawings”) lining up across the perpendicular surface between them. Though the drawings hung in roughly the same plane, an approximately two-foot wide gap or doorway divided the two walls on which they hung: Death Wish and Persephone shared a temporary wall, which was slightly detached from the seemingly permanent one that held Origin, and Daphne hung on a narrow strip which quickly met the broader partition, on which The Veronica rested. The gaps between the walls made the enclosure porous and would have allowed viewers to glimpse works in the adjacent galleries which belonged to Kelly, Johns, and Louise Nevelson, who was the only other female artist in the show. The space shared the Dilexi’s minimal look, though MoMA’s reflective linoleum floors and lack of molding and natural light gave it an even sleeker, more sterile feel typical of its “white cube” aesthetic.

Coherence versus Diversity
The exhibitions’ shared design sensibility makes the dramatic differences between their selection and installation of DeFeo’s works all the more striking. The group of works Miller displayed represented a very narrow spectrum of the broad range of media, styles, formats, compositions, sizes, and processes evident in the Dilexi show. All five works had a slightly larger than human scale and roughly the same slender proportions, with the exception of the somewhat squatter Origin. The Dilexi show demonstrates that this grand scale and graceful format were typical of DeFeo’s works from the period (encouraged, perhaps, by the tall ceilings of her Fillmore apartment) but were by no means ubiquitous. For “Sixteen Americans,” Miller excised outliers like the declaratively horizontal The Eyes (1958) and the easel-sized Landscape

74 Miller, 6.
75 The display principle that Miller developed for the “Americans” series was a variation of “the white flexible container,” the installation idiom crafted by the Museum’s first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., which became the dominant mode of exhibiting modern art in the twentieth century (Charlotte Klonk, Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800-2000 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2009)). Due to the collaborative nature of exhibition production, it is difficult to know exactly how much control Miller had over the installation design of “Sixteen Americans.” However, given that she was ultimately in charge of the exhibition, it seems likely that she approved of the display even if she did not design it herself.
76 Solnit makes a similar observation about Miller’s selection of Hedrick’s works (79).
More than these physical similarities, the most noticeable characteristic uniting Miller’s selections was their common aesthetic: they were all gestural abstractions. The individual lines and brushstrokes that composed each work retained their identity as such and figured prominently and richly in the viewer’s perceptual experience. Although Miller rejected a portion of the gestural abstractions in the Dilexi show, she rejected all the abstractions that employed a vocabulary of more defined, geometric shapes (such as, *Tear* (1959) and *Dr. Jazz* (1958)) and those works that featured representational forms (such as, *The Eyes, Figure in a Landscape, The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, and the photomontages). Both rejected groups had a formal flavor quite distinct from those she favored: their iconicity meant that they were more static and symmetrical with more defined and stable figure-ground relations. They also prompted a different viewing experience. Their more coherent forms meant that viewers were apt to read them first as shape or image and then attend to the marks that composed them which, while still legible, were no longer the primary conveyor of meaning but relegated to secondary visual interest. In the works that Miller selected, form appeared to have been discovered through exploratory mark-making, while in those she did not, form appeared to have been given *a priori*; that is, artistic action (regardless of the specific materials and procedures with which it was performed) seemed to have started with reference to an abstract shape, a representational image, or thing. 

Notably, then, the works Miller chose and those she did not provided remarkably different accounts of creative process.

While it is unclear why Miller favored DeFeo’s gestural abstractions, the fact that she favored them exclusively suggests that her decisions were guided, in part at least, by the principle of coherence. It indicates that the curator calculated her choices to assemble a relatively cohesive body of DeFeo’s work. There was a much smaller degree of difference among DeFeo’s works in “Sixteen Americans” than there was among those in the San Francisco show, and there were also fewer types of difference between the MoMA works than there were between the Dilexi works. Relative to the wide array of works chosen for the Dilexi show, Miller’s ensemble was highly uniform in terms of palette, size, format, and, most importantly, process. The works were distinguished from each other primarily by their compositions and, to a lesser extent, their media – specifically, their ratio of wet to dry media, of meaty brushstrokes to thin drawn lines. Given the group’s high degree of stylistic similitude, these differences read as variations within a common material and procedural ground.

Miller’s arrangement of the artist’s works augmented their cohesiveness in two ways (see figs. 7 and 8). First, it organized the material and formal variations between the works. By displaying the artist’s three mixed-media pieces along one side of the gallery, Miller effectively classified the five works into two stable media categories – drawing and painting. The installation also ordered the works by line quality, starting with *Origin’s* crisp, tensile streaks and

---

77 Also, the three mixed-media works Miller chose were composed of the same combination of materials – graphite, charcoal, and oil paint on canvas-mounted paper. The Dilexi show included mix-media works that employed a wider range of substances, including house paint, tempera, and board supports.

78 These works were *Prologue to the Rose* (1956), *Song of Innocence* (1957), *Young Bird of Paradise*, and *The Annunciation* (1957-59).

79 Both *Landscape with Figure* and *The Eyes* were loosely modeled on photographs.

80 Perhaps Miller singled out the artist’s large gestural abstractions because she thought they would be palatable to New York audiences familiar with Abstract Expressionism; or, perhaps she simply thought they were the artist’s “strongest” works.
ending with *The Veronica*’s lush, fluid strokes. By systematizing the variations among DeFeo’s works, Miller’s display defined the boundaries of their difference, making it manageable. Second, the balanced installation pushed the works to visually cohere. The hang unfolded along four lines of roughly bilateral symmetry: *Persephone* acted as the central axis of the gallery’s long face across which the curves of *Death Wish* and *Daphne* echoed each other; *Origin* and *The Veronica* reached across the corners of the gallery, in turn, to complete the drawings’ arching forms and also to mirror each other across the room. The arrangement choreographed the largely asymmetrical compositions into a visual ensemble that endowed the group with a sense of equilibrium and completion. Under Miller’s direction DeFeo’s art pieces became puzzle pieces, fitting together into a synthetic whole.

The cohesiveness of Miller’s display is all the more striking in light of DeFeo’s installation of her Dilexi show. If Miller’s arrangement was calibrated to highlight the works’ similitude while containing their differences, DeFeo’s seemed designed to accomplish the exact opposite. It reveled in the diversity of her works, jumbling disparate pieces together to the point, in places, of juxtaposing extremes – as in her decision to hang *Landscape with Figure*, a twenty-one by twenty-five inch still-life rendered in a whimsically naïve style with heavily impastoed oil on canvas, next to *Death Wish*, an eighty-nine by forty-three inch dynamically asymmetrical gestural abstraction produced with graphite, charcoal, and oil paint on a mounted paper surface. Unlike Miller, DeFeo did not group her works according to media, style, or any other immediately discernable logic. Rather than smooth over the distinctions between works, the chaotic and imbalanced installation amplified them so that they read as chasms of difference rather than as minor variations.

In the Dilexi show, DeFeo did more than represent a greater range of her aesthetic sensibilities and repertoire of artistic procedures than Miller did at MoMA; she made this diversity the guiding principle of her installation. This observation suggests that an idea of multiplicity was somehow foundational to DeFeo’s conception of her artistic practice or, at least, to the stories she told about it. By singling out only one type of work, in terms of style and process, from DeFeo’s oeuvre for display in “Sixteen Americans,” then, Miller crafted an account of the artist’s practice that was not only selective, as it inevitably would have been, but distorted in the false coherence it brings to her works. The dramatic contrast between Miller’s and DeFeo’s installations, in other words, implies that they were conceived with and conveyed fundamentally different pictures of the way the artist’s creative process unfolded across her works.

*An Artist as a Serial Expressionist*

There is very little evidence of the impressions that visitors to “Sixteen Americans” formed of DeFeo’s art. Other than two brief human-interest stories in San Francisco newspapers about the couple’s participation in the exhibition (articles which testified to the novelty of local artists showing in New York), only two of the scores of reviews in East-Coast and nationally-circulating publications mentioned DeFeo’s work.81 Dennis Leon of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* found it “difficult to accept the works of artists such as Frank Stella, Jack Youngerman or J. de

---

81 “S.F. Couple Exhibit Art at N.Y. Museum,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 28, 1959, clipping from MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.i and “S.F. Paintings in N.Y. Exhibit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 27, 1959, clipping from the San Francisco Art Institute Archives, Jay DeFeo file. I adopted the latter headline for the title of this paper. Sidney Tillim also mentioned DeFeo in his hyper-critical review for *Arts Magazine* (February 1960); he did not address her works, however.
Feo [sic]” in contrast to “the work of Louise Nevelson,” which he described as “full of implication and association.”82 In The New Yorker, by comparison, Robert Coates singled out “J. De Feo’s sinuously patterned ‘The Veronica’” for praise along with works by Robert Mallary, Kelly, Youngerman, and Jim Jarvaise.83 These passing appraisals, one negative and one positive, are too thin to provide a full sense of the ways contemporary viewers perceived the exhibition’s representation of DeFeo’s artistic practice.

Given that “Sixteen Americans” was a high-profile, controversial show that generated a good deal of vehement press coverage, the general silence about DeFeo is notable and, as historian Richard Cândida Smith observed, in many ways more telling than the fleeting mentions of her.84 What factors accounted for her relative “absence from the critical record”?85 What, that is, made her art unworthy of note to most reviewers? The question is speculative. However, the exhibition’s representation of her artistic practice sheds some light on the interpretations that contemporary viewers were likely to form of her work. Specifically, it suggests that her practice would have been understood as typically abstract expressionist.

Miller constructed DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” in such a way that it conveyed the sense that the artist’s creative activity proceeded in a generally serial manner. I use the term “serial” here in its broadest sense – to describe artistic practices that unfold by means of reiteration.86 The stylistic consistency and unifying arrangement of the works in DeFeo’s ensemble concocted the impression that she created them by repeating the same production principle within a narrow set of material parameters. That is, by reducing the differences between DeFeo’s works to, essentially, compositional variation, Miller made it seem as if each work was a new manifestation of the same technique and aesthetic idea. Granted, DeFeo’s suite did not obtain quite the high level of formal and thematic regularity characteristic of the modernist series, in which a single motif provides the framework for compositional play. Jarvaise’s “Hudson River Series” represented this mode of production in “Sixteen Americans” (fig. 9). Nor did her gallery convey the bleak uniformity of works made via postmodernist seriality, a practice which Stella’s formulaic black paintings exemplified starkly (in both senses of the word) (fig. 10).87 Despite the visual coherence of Miller’s installation, that is, DeFeo’s gallery did not quite give the impression that she had produced the five works as “part of a larger group.”88 Still, DeFeo’s display made it seem that her practice shared the two basic characteristics that distinguished both Jarvaise’s and Stella’s working methods as serial: 1) she appeared to have generated her works from a common material, procedural, and conceptual matrix, and 2) she seemed to have created them more or less successively. While Miller’s hang did not make any definitive claims about the order in which DeFeo produced her works, its fluid continuity spatially staged a sequential relationship between them and would have invited viewers to regard each in turn – the installation’s dynamic flow pulling their attention from one work to the next.

82 Quoted from MoMA Press Summary. The summary excerpts the article, which it lists as Dennis Leon, Philadelphia Inquirer, December 17, 1959. I have not yet been able to locate the article in full.
84 Smith, The Modern, 112. Other scholarly summaries of “Sixteen Americans” reviews include Zelevansky 81-82, Solnit 75, Berkson 48, and Schoenthal 235.
85 Ibid., Smith.
86 Fer, 2.
87 Definitions of the modern series and postmodern seriality also from Fer, 2.
The dictates of DeFeo’s serial practice, as it appeared in “Sixteen Americans,” consisted of the following repeated material, procedural, and conceptual building blocks. The material specifications for her creative activity appeared to demand large vertical paper and/or canvas supports ranging in length from seven to eleven feet – a measurement which was, on average, double the support’s width – and some combination of graphite, charcoal, and/or oil paint in subtly varied but monochromatic hues. In addition, the abstract and gestural nature of the works suggested that DeFeo created them all using the same expressionist production principle. The prominence and vigor of the works’ marks – Daphne’s unblended tumult of thick, dripping brushstrokes (fig. 11) or Origin’s rising forms (fig. 12) – registered the dynamism and spontaneity of her manipulation of pigment. Glimpses at Kelly’s precisely delimited shapes and Johns’ flagrantly borrowed icons would have amplified the impression of DeFeo’s process as energetic and exploratory.

Other formal aspects of the works, however, suggested that her technique pulled back from utter automatism. Though the works’ bold, dynamic marks implied that DeFeo produced them hastily, their layered surfaces – especially the thick accretion of discrete paint streaks in Origin (fig. 12) – testified to more extended production periods. The combination of vigorous paint application and layering conjured a punctuated process, in which bursts of frenzied activity gave way to lulls that lasted at least long enough for the paint to dry. Some marks on each work were also too directed (e.g., Origin’s regimented procession of palette-knifed paint trails) and deliberate (e.g., the belabored outlines which corralled the erratic interior lines of Death Wish (fig. 13)) to have been entirely improvised. Moreover, the conglomerations of lines and brushstrokes in her works coalesced into evocative gestalts. Both features indicated that there were moments when DeFeo’s artistic actions were calculated and controlled, when her energetic experimentation with the materials ceded to careful composition.

Her brief catalog statement acknowledged, somewhat elliptically, the dual nature of her artistic process: “I regard myself as an expressionist as well as a symbolist. If expressionism implies emotional impact, I can realize it only by restraint and ultimate refinement.”89 It is difficult to unpack DeFeo’s idiosyncratic definitions of “expressionism” and “symbolism” given the pithiness of her catalog statement. The letter from which Miller lifted the text provides only a few clues, mostly regarding her definition of expressionism, which DeFeo associates with “emotion and energy,” “feeling,” and pushing paint “around boldly and feely.”90 In the quoted passage, she appears to associate symbolism with controlled painting techniques that oppose expressionism’s free-wheeling mark-making. She implies that her painting process synthesizes these opposing methods to enhance the “emotional impact” of the final canvas.

The nature of the interaction between the exploratory and intentional aspects of her technique was largely illegible in the context of “Sixteen Americans.” The fact that all of her displayed works were gestural abstractions, however, implied that her process was autonomous – that the consciously crafted structure of each work was not imposed (i.e., was not a result of reference) but evolved out of, or at least in tandem with, extemporaneous mark-making. For example, the sprays of delicate stippling that shaped the bold, blunt brushstrokes of The Veronica into fluttering fronds evoked a process of honing forms “discovered” through the dynamic manipulation of paint (fig. 14). While each of DeFeo’s five works in “Sixteen Americans” evidenced a slightly different – and largely indeterminate – set and sequence of artistic procedures, each process ultimately read as a form of tempered automatism.

89 Jay DeFeo, Sixteen Americans, 8.
90 DeFeo, letter to Miller, November 18, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
The thematic affinity of the works Miller assembled also contributed to the representation of DeFeo’s practice as serial. All five works explored the idea of emergence.91 The works’ balanced mixture of dynamic marks and compositional structure, as well as their literary titles, communicated this motif. For example, Daphne and Persephone (fig. 15) referenced Ovidian heroines and thus invited visitors to read the works’ gestural compositions as transitioning figures, specifically as female bodies undergoing metamorphosis.92 Daphne bore a loose likeness to traditional representations of the myth (the most famous being Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s marble sculpture of Apollo and Daphne (1622-25) in the Galleria Borghese in Rome (fig. 16), a piece which DeFeo may have encountered during her post-MA fellowship year in Europe.)93 Like its predecessors, DeFeo’s Daphne evoked the climactic moment when the hapless nymph transformed into a laurel tree. The turbulent column of thick, white and gray brushstrokes and charcoal lines narrowed in the middle as if to define a waist – an impression aided by the under-layer of black paint and smudged charcoal which girdled the figure like a cartoonish outline. Moreover, the two shafts of white paint that shot up from this torso-trunk seemed to signify limbs, both human and arboreal. As much as these likenesses compelled viewers to read the column of gestural marks as the nymph, however, they remained firmly in the realm of simile. The reference, like the morphing body it conjured, remained incomplete – halted at the level of association and evocation. As with all of DeFeo’s works in “Sixteen Americans,” the marks that composed Daphne’s suggestive form were too legible as such to become fully “other.” It simultaneously read as both figural and abstract.94

The sense of swirling, violent growth that Daphne’s marks conveyed was also in keeping with the myth. DeFeo’s chaotic layering of staccato brushstrokes and charcoal lines, which darted in and out of the textured streaks, created a sense of inexorable upward motion. This

91 In The Modern Moves West, Smith tracks this motif of emergence, “of forming as a process,” in his discussion of DeFeo’s works from the mid to late 1950s, including Origin, The Veronica, and The Wise and Foolish Virgins (“From an Era of Grand Ambitions,” 75-97).
92 The other drawing in the show, Death Wish, also represents emergence. Inchoate interior scribbles gave way to heavy charcoal outlines. On the one hand, these belabored borders read as accretive extensions of the wispy interior marks, which seemed to actively hew out space and shape. On the other hand, they read as oppositional forces delimiting and rigidifying the fluid inner lines and imposing order on their erratic, tangled paths. The charcoal lines seemed to herd the marks into bursting bundles, which unstably cohered into an awkward, disjointed gestalt. The support’s slender format, slightly larger than human scale, and its un-worked background gave the resolutely abstract silhouette a figural feel. But the figure’s synthesis remained incomplete. Flowing lines breached their borders, especially at the form’s top and bottom, and gushed into negative space. Moments of volume, such as along the figure’s left-hand side, quickly collapsed into surface. DeFeo seemed to capture the figure at the instant of its incipience, when chaos and motion began to give way, however unsteadily, to structure and stability. Death Wish, in other words, staged a process of dynamic emergence – of form caught in the act of becoming. Its title speaks to the metamorphic character of the drawings in a more oblique way than Daphne and Persephone. Perhaps DeFeo read the tussle between the charcoal borders and the interior marks as representative of the rational mind’s efforts to contain unconscious urges.
93 DeFeo was awarded the Sigmund Martine Heller Travelling Fellowship in 1951 when she earned her Master’s degree in art from UC Berkeley.
94 Brigid Doherty has described, eloquently, DeFeo’s flirtation with content as follows: “Her imagery, which persistently evokes associations while defying definitions, occupies an area between suggestion and symbolism. It does not operate strictly as visual play, yet still stops short of readable representation” (“Imaging Seeing,” Jay DeFeo: Works on Paper (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1989), 31). Similarly, Smith has discussed the way DeFeo’s works force the viewer to shuttle between language and sensuous experience: “The vision of something beyond that the image provokes vanishes almost as soon as it is felt because it is the product of a receptive mind at work. An object reappears as a viewer falls from sensuous experience back into the systems of representation that govern ordinary perception” (The Modern Moves West, 97).
hectic emergence hastened towards the top of the figure where the fat, white brushstrokes gave
to nimble, slightly twisting charcoal lines. This dramatic change in the thickness, color, and
texture of the line created a sense of spritely acceleration that read as plant-like growth: the
delicate yet dynamic lines seemed to burst forth with the fury and fragility of a crown of new
branches. The painting, then, attributed to the figure the kind of autonomous, energized creation
that its tumult of lines and brushstrokes seemed to index. The illusion that Daphne-the-figure
was violently growing before viewers’ eyes, that is, amounted to a perpetual performance of the
process that created Daphne-the-work. As both figural and abstract, Daphne signified both
iconically and indexically. Instead of troubling its autonomy, the work’s vague layer of content
(i.e., its reference to Ovid’s tale) was ultimately self-reflexive: the story of emergence it
dramatized coincided, more or less, with the production process it appeared to evidence. Rather
than distract viewers’ from the work’s material production, in other words, Daphne’s
associations took them on a slight detour – guided by the title – that eventually led back to the
work itself.

As association-rich gestural abstractions “about” emergence, all of the works in DeFeo’s
gallery were doubly self-reflexive in this way. The hint of content in Death Wish, for example,
translated DeFeo’s dynamic actions, which the work indexed, into a quality of the figure. The
spray of charcoal lines at the top left read as traces of the artist’s exuberant drawing process, but
they also seemed to exercise their own vital will to form: they appeared to perform the action of
stretching or reaching as they pulled away from the column of marks anchoring them to the
support’s right side, the roughness of the scumbled paint beneath adding to their insistence. The
sense of motion these lines conveyed was legible as both an artifact of DeFeo’s production
process and a property of the nascent figure summoned forth by the composition.

Origin, with its squatter format and all-over paint application, resembled a landscape
more than a figural work. As with the drawings, however, its compositional organization coated
the evidence of DeFeo’s bold painting process with an image of primordial creation. Its
procession of distinct, exceedingly long paint trails registered her athletic manipulation of a
pigment-laden implement (most likely a palette-knife) over the canvas in repeated sloping arcs.
The puckered, relief-like tip of each stroke and the cement-like scumbling of the painting’s lower
half viscerally demonstrated the paint’s material properties. The marks, however, not only
evidenced the medium’s physical qualities and the artist’s dynamic actions; their texture,
regularity, and form created the illusion that the marks themselves were endowed with an
internal dynamism. Specifically, the combination of a defined, sculptural tip and tapering tail
gave each stroke a sense of independent upward propulsion. In this fictional scenario, the faint
mud-colored striations punctuating the lower light-gray field read as dissipating trails – like
those produced by jet engines – left by the dark paint streaks as they propelled over the rough
surface. The gradated change in texture along the canvas’ mid-horizontal axis augmented this
illusion of accelerated movement. Friction appeared to give way to momentum as the paint trails
burst above the scumbled field – the canvas’s barely detectable verticality secretly boosting their
launch. In addition, the strokes’ sculptural presence and repetitive uniformity made their action
appear urgent and insistent: they seemed to clamor at the surface, pushing it both back into
shallow recession and forward into layered relief. Alfred Frankenstein captured Origin’s internal
dynamism in his review of the Dilexi’s anniversary show, which opened on the heels of DeFeo’s
solo exhibition. He described the painting as “an event in itself – the huge canvas called Origin,
by J. De Feo [sic]. It is a gray-and-white abstraction composed of immensely powerful vertical strokes, pressing, tense and busting with vitality . . .”95

As its title implied, Origin depicted the moment this energized ground gave way to form. Just left of center the “horizon line” cascaded downward, creating a hint of shape and depth. Here, becoming was not an act of synthesis as it was in DeFeo’s drawings; it was an act of breaking rank, of shattering the monotony of repetition. The divot’s off-center placement gave it a haphazard quality. Form seemed to emerge accidentally, as when the first atoms unwittingly crossed paths and set off the chain reaction that gave birth to the universe. The details of Origin’s creation story diverged from the specific artistic actions it seemed to evidence. The paint trails, for example, appeared to shoot upward, contrary to the direction in which DeFeo must have painted them, and the impression that the strokes rocketed forth in a burst of simultaneous speed belied the extended period of reiterative paint application required to create this illusion.96 Despite the discrepancies between Origin’s layers of signification, its general narrative of the spontaneous emergence of form resonated with, and thus allegorized, the dynamic painting process it appeared to index.

***

Given the representation of DeFeo’s artistic practice that Miller’s selection and installation created, it is likely that many, if not most, visitors to “Sixteen Americans” associated her art with Abstract Expressionism. The style, process, tone, and content that her works conveyed in the exhibition fit the basic terms that constituted Abstract Expressionism in the cultural imaginary of the United States in 1959. At the beginning of that year, the “victorious return” of “The New American Painting,” a blockbuster show of seventeen abstract-expressionist painters, to MoMA after its long European tour unleashed a deluge of discussion about the decade-old movement in both art-press and mass-media publications.97 The exhibition’s popularity in Europe was viewed widely as a stunning victory for the United States on the cultural front of the Cold War. Both the exhibition, which Miller curated, and the press coverage of it held up the monumental, “freewheeling” paintings as “emblems of freedom and individuality,” among other liberal democratic values.98 The overt ideological implications that the exhibition publically attached to Abstract Expressionism pushed discussion of the avant-garde style further into mainstream publications and consciousness. This discourse continued well beyond the exhibition’s April closing date; Life magazine, for example, published two extensive features on the movement one month before “Sixteen Americans” opened in mid-December.99 The hyperbolic claims such articles staked for Abstract Expressionism – “the first American ‘movement’ to exert a powerful, world-wide influence” (Kenneth Rexroth for Art News), “this country[’s] . . . certified contemporary style” (Hilton Kramer for The Reporter), “the

96 Smith details the painstaking technique DeFeo used to create Origin in The Modern Moves West, 80.
most influential style of art in the world today” (Dorothy Sieberling for Life) – testified to its currency. 100

Due to the movement’s prevalence, most of the general public who visited “Sixteen Americans” were probably familiar with the media’s construction of Abstract Expressionism’s stylistic traits, tenets of production, and the “ideological burden” they were made to bear. 101 Furthermore, the fact that the previous two “Americans” exhibitions had predominantly featured artists identified as abstract expressionists (many of whom Miller also showcased in “The New American Painting”) set up the presumption, especially among the target audience of art-world insiders, that “Sixteen Americans” would have a similar bias. 102 Thomas Hess expressed this expectation, rather crucially, when describing the exhibition’s surprising diversity for Art News: “the show seems to attempt a demonstration of what is coming after the generation of Pollock, de Kooning, Still, Gottlieb, etc., which the Museum already has pinned into its collection of Famous-Insects-We-Have-Caught.” 103

DeFeo’s art, as represented in “Sixteen Americans,” matched many of the tropes of Abstract Expressionism being bantered across the pages of catalogs, newspapers, and magazines at the time. In his introduction to “The New American Painting” catalog, MoMA’s director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., identified the three defining aesthetic features of abstract expressionist works: they had a “high degree of abstraction,” were “as big as mural paintings,” and were rendered “with large gestures.” 104 DeFeo’s five works in “Sixteen Americans” certainly met these broad stylistic criteria. It seems probable that many viewers reflexively processed her works through the lens of Abstract Expressionism simply because they were monumental abstractions that highlighted “the stroke of [the artist’s] brush” and “the slash of [her] palette knife.” 105 For example, Coates sorted the exhibition’s artists into aesthetic categories – constructions, “the almost boisterously Abstract Expressionist (Jack Youngerman, Alfred Leslie, Richard Lytle, and so on) and the more or less rigorously geometric (Ellsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella).” 106 Though he did not name DeFeo explicitly in his inventory of abstract expressionists, given the other stylistic options he laid out it is safe to assume that he intended the list’s appended “and so on” to encompass her work. The adjectives Life used to characterize the dramatic style – “tense, explosive,” “physical vigor,” “sloppy, chaotic,” “immediate and powerful” – could easily apply to DeFeo’s suite in “Sixteen Americans.” 107 Based on Miller’s

101 Kramer, 42.
103 Hess, 56-57.
105 Sieberling, “Four Pioneers,” 86.
106 Coates, 61.
107 The first two quotes are from Sieberling, “Baffling,” 69, and the second two are from “Four Pioneers,” 86. Some of the adjectives in this list did not apply to every painting in DeFeo’s gallery. As the above descriptions indicate, many of the exhibited works tempered chaos by suggesting the emergence of form, and many of her meticulously rendered works eschewed the epithet “sloppy.” However, the splatters of paint on Daphne and the seemingly random patches of white paint in the background of Persephone create a sense of haphazard materiality characteristic of abstract-expressionist painting.
representation of the artist’s work, only her drab palette was incompatible with magazine’s illustrated profile of abstract expressionist art.

DeFeo’s works in “Sixteen Americans” not only bore the telltale aesthetic markers of Abstract Expressionism; they created the impression that her artistic practice followed a clichéd script of abstract-expressionist creative activity. “Automatism was, and still is, widely used as a technique,” wrote Barr, “but rarely without some control or subsequent revision.”108 He went on to describe this process of revision as “a struggle for order almost as intuitive as the initial chaos with which the paintings began.”109 The balance between dynamic marks and compositional organization that characterized the works in DeFeo’s gallery seemed to testify to just such a play between “paint-pushing” and “refinement,” to use the artist’s terms. Furthermore, the loosely serial dynamic of her practice fit popular myths of abstract expressionist production. According to such accounts, the artist created each work autonomously, but because each “act” expressed the depths of the artist’s unique self, each individual work bore some of the same identifying stylistic traits.110 Articles such as Life’s “The Varied Art of Four Pioneers” – which portrayed the signature aesthetics of four abstract-expressionist painters, Still’s “agitated shapes,” Kline’s “dynamic thrusts,” DeKooning’s “fast, slashing brushstrokes,” and Rothko’s “horizontal bands” – perpetuated this idea of abstract expressionist practice.111

Moreover, the works’ motif of emergence linked the evidence of this process to an ideology of creativity that echoed mythology surrounding the abstract expressionist “act.” By associating DeFeo’s process with myths and other ponderous referents (e.g., death, bull-fighting, etc),112 the works’ vague, self-reflexive content added meanings to her artistic action that resonated “outside the confines of art.”113 Inflated by these connotations, her process stood for autonomous creation in a more universal sense. This aspect of the works mirrored the convention, present in both abstract expressionist works and discussions of them, of framing the artists’ spontaneous paint application in existential, moral, political, economic, psychological, and even mystical terms.

For example, both the content and tone of DeFeo’s works in “Sixteen Americans” aligned with Harold Rosenberg’s famous description, in his 1952 essay “The American Action Painters,” of the artist’s gesture as an act of liberating self-definition.114 By the time Rosenberg’s essay was republished in 1959,115 its inflated rhetoric and thesis of artistic individualism pervaded the literature on Abstract Expressionism, including Barr’s catalog essay.116 “Confronting the blank canvas,” wrote Barr of the artists in “The New American Painting,” “they attempt ‘to grasp authentic being by action, decision, a leap of faith’, to use Karl Jasper’s Existentialist phrase.”117 Creation was also a well-known, even hackneyed, theme of abstract expressionist works. For

108 Barr, 16.
109 Ibid., 17.
110 Despite the fact that much rhetoric surrounding Abstract Expressionism fixated on the autonomy of artist, act, work, and viewer, many artists affiliated with the movement flirted with the modernist series. Famous examples include, DeKooning’s “Woman” paintings of the early 1950s and Rothko’s “Stations of the Cross” (1958-66) cycle.
111 Sieberling, “Four Pioneers,” 76, 79, 80, and 82.
112 These examples refer to Death Wish and The Veronica, which DeFeo titled after “the pass in bull fighting” (DeFeo, letter to Miller, November 18, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k).
113 Quote from Kramer, 42.
116 In his scathing review of “Sixteen Americans,” Tillim (also see note 50) held up DeFeo’s catalog statement as exemplary of the self-serious individualism of the show’s artists.
117 Barr, 16.
example, Barnett Newman’s minimalist “zip paintings,” which Miller included in the traveling show, likened artistic action to God’s conjuration of matter from the abyss (fig. 17). DeFeo’s account of the creative act, staged in works such as *Origin* and *Daphne*, was more pagan than Newman’s biblical creation *ex nihilo*. Still, the subject of her works in “Sixteen Americans” fit the general mold of this well-worn abstract expressionist motif.

***

In his recent book *The Modern Moves West*, Smith argued that DeFeo’s works were “invisible to the show’s critics” because they expressed a distinctly West-Coast understanding of art that was too alien to either register with or interest New York reviewers. My analysis of the exhibition’s representation of her artistic practice, however, suggests that critics largely ignored her art because it seemed too familiar rather than too foreign. After all, the bulk of discussion about “Sixteen Americans” across the political spectrum was devoted to deciphering and evaluating the new directions it proposed for artistic practice – whether to trumpet them (as did progressive critics such as Hess) or mock them (as did conservative critics such as John Canaday of *The New York Times* and Emily Genauer of *The New York Herald Tribune*). If DeFeo’s works read as typically abstract expressionist in the exhibition, as seems likely, then it is little wonder they flew under a critical radar attuned, as it was, to “the new.”

Abstract Expressionism’s recent apotheosis in “The New American Painting” had established it definitively as the dominant, institutionalized style of contemporary American art – which is to say, as anything but fresh and cutting edge. The travelling show had sparked a lively deliberation in the New York art world and its art press about the style’s possible exhaustion. Pundits debated, both in person and through publications, whether The New York School had become “The New Academy” – a conventionalized language, a set of empty tropes, that, as such, could no longer facilitate authentic individual expression. For example, in his review of “The New American Painting” for *The Reporter*, Hilton Kramer recognized the style’s fatigue in the paintings’ “athleticism going to seed in preciosity.” “If this is the future,” he continued bleakly, “the future is going to be meager.” Kramer’s diatribe suggests that critics whose views of “Sixteen Americans” were influenced by this debate were more likely to perceive DeFeo’s “restrained expressionism” as a Mandarin dead-end for artistic practice than as a possible future for it.

Preston’s review of “Sixteen Americans” conflated Abstract Expressionism with American art’s immediate past and looked for its future elsewhere in the exhibition:

In American art, the 1950’s were the years of ‘Action Painting,’ the dynamic sensation of a personal expression eternalized in a painter’s gesture . . . . This egocentric attitude will persist into

---

118 Smith, 119. Smith’s discussion also includes Hedrick.
119 I hesitate to make generalizing claims about the reviewers’ reasons for overlooking DeFeo because they represented such a diverse field of cultural perspectives and agendas.
120 Canaday was so enraged by the exhibition that he wrote about it twice (“It Talks Good,” March 6, 1960, X13 and “Evolution of a Public,” January 31, 1960, X17). Genauer’s evaluation of Stella’s “black paintings” was so eviscerating that *Time* magazine summarized it in its arts column (“Higher Criticism,” January 11, 1960, 59). Obviously, the majority of critics occupied the wide middle ground between these two extremes.
121 For example, on April 10, 1959, The Club, a 10th Street art-world meeting house, hosted a panel discussion on the subject titled “What is the New Academy?.” The event inspired a two-part *Art News* feature published in the Summer and September issues. Both Rexroth’s and Kramer’s reviews of “The New American Painting” expressed this doomsday view, while Hess rejected it in his review of 1959.
122 Kramer, 42.
123 Both Hess’s and Kuh’s reviews also discuss Abstract Expressionism in the past tense.
This passage betrays Preston’s perception that Abstract Expressionism belongs to the 1950s, the decade which he sees “Sixteen Americans” as ushering out. This combination of assumptions likely deflected his attention away from the show’s gestural abstractions. Though Preston’s beliefs – that Abstract Expressionism was over and that “Sixteen Americans” was a barometer of coming trends – were neither unanimous nor always overtly expressed, they were widely held and helped shape the critical response to “Sixteen Americans.” Specifically, these beliefs, among other factors, led to artists like Frank Stella (who positioned his radically new process and artistic identity in direct opposition to Abstract Expressionism) receiving far more press coverage than artists like DeFeo (who seemed to continue the mature movement’s legacy). Turning back to The Dilexi show will demonstrate that DeFeo was not just “invisible to the show’s critics” because, as Smith claimed, her “work had developed in another location with its own conversation about the future of painting,” but because that “conversation” was essentially inaudible when projected through MoMA’s physical and ideological frames of reception.

Metamorphosis, Mutation, and Mimesis

DeFeo’s artistic practice registered as typically abstract expressionist in “Sixteen Americans,” but how had it appeared five months earlier in her solo exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery? What facets of her practice were legible in the hometown show but invisible in New York? In what follows, I analyze three representative moments of the Dilexi display to tease out some of the possible impressions that the exhibition allowed, and even encouraged, viewers to form of DeFeo’s aesthetic production. As with “Sixteen Americans,” the paucity of textual evidence regarding the Dilexi show limits the claims I can make about it. The single review it garnered does not provide sufficient information to determine if contemporary viewers experienced the exhibition in the ways I deduce from the installation shots, nor can I link my analysis to DeFeo’s intentions, which are documented by the hanging alone. However, the visual evidence strongly suggests that visitors to the San Francisco show would have come away...
with very different understandings of her artistic practice compared with visitors to “Sixteen Americans.” The following analysis traces some of these probable discrepancies, arguing that the Dilexi show portrayed her practice as relational rather than serial.

DeFeo’s arrangement of *Death Wish* and *Daphne* (fig. 18) provides a telling counterpoint to Miller’s installation because, unlike most aspects of the Dilexi show, their placement shared some common ground with her gallery in “Sixteen Americans.”129 This detail of the exhibition included two works that Miller selected, and the curator’s arrangement of them slightly resembled DeFeo’s. It is difficult to determine if the artist’s installation of the pair inspired the curator’s display, though, since the liberal modifications she made transformed the design and feel of the hang almost beyond recognition. Miller retained the order in which DeFeo hung the works – that is, with *Death Wish* to the right of *Daphne* so that their sweeping compositions curved away from each other. But while DeFeo placed the works at right angles across the gallery’s back west corner, Miller arranged them along roughly the same plane and inserted *Persephone* (and a doorway) between them.130 It is worth noting that this configuration – of two works pulling away from each other across a corner – was completely avoided in Miller’s installation not only of DeFeo’s gallery but of “Sixteen Americans” as a whole.

Both DeFeo and Miller channeled the illusion of motion created by the works’ asymmetrical compositions and gestural marks to make their installations visually dynamic. Ultimately, though, their divergent arrangements crafted dramatically different optical impressions of the animated relationship between *Death Wish* and *Daphne*. In “Sixteen Americans,” the works’ curving compositions perceptually continued the outward motion generated by *Persephone’s* centrifugal cascade. They appeared to passively channel the same expansive movement, their reflected silhouettes adding balance to their fluidity.

In the Dilexi show, however, where *Death Wish* and *Daphne* pivoted around a corner rather than *Persephone*, the energy they appeared to generate was anything but fluent and harmonious. The corner physically reiterated the edge of each work from which form appeared to spring. The works’ contrasting frames, *Daphne’s* black and *Death Wish’s* white, drew attention to their borders, augmenting the sense that each form was generated from the outside in.131 Together, the corner and the frames acted like an architectural anchor compounding the feeling of resistance, of taut energy, that the two asymmetrical compositions generated independently. Directly juxtaposed across this physical pivot, the works’ mirrored, thrusting compositions read as opposing forces straining against each other rather than as continuations of the same coursing motion. They seemed to counterpoise, rather than passively balance, each other – each actively checking the other’s flow. The energy they appeared to generate was tense

---

129 The Jay DeFeo Trust holds fourteen photographs of the Dilexi show. (DeFeo’s Papers at the Archives of American Art also contains two prints of the exhibition.) Some are silver gelatin prints and some are 35 mm slides. Both the author of the photographs and the date(s) they were taken are unknown. The photographer, for some of the shots at least, was definitely not DeFeo as she appears in them. For reasons discussed in footnotes 25 and 28, I conjecture that the photographs were taken at different points during the installation process. Most of the shots are close-ups of individual works, indicating that the photographer’s (or photographers’) main objective was to catalog the exhibition’s contents rather than to document the installation. Thus, the existence of a photograph that depicts *Death Wish* and *Daphne* in the gallery setting may indicate that the photographer deemed their arrangement significant or exceptional.

130 While Miller certainly had more gallery space and control over its configuration than DeFeo, the ample space the artist left to the other side of *Death Wish* indicates that she deliberately chose not to place the work further away from the corner.

131 DeFeo mounted *Daphne* on a canvas coated with black oil paint. She also added a border of black tape that moves from the edge of the canvas inward.
and potentially destabilizing, like that of a loaded spring. DeFeo, in short, constructed an actively oppositional relationship between *Death Wish* and *Daphne* that could not have been further from the sense of easy succession and equilibrium that would soon enliven Miller’s display.

The two installations not only staged contrasting interactions between *Death Wish* and *Daphne*; they crafted distinct accounts of the commonalities and differences between the two works. By cramming the pair together, DeFeo’s display drew out the resemblances between their cantilevered compositions. The works’ proximity to each other, that is, amplified the echoes between their forms – off-center columns which explode into curving marks at either end, with the top burst roughly organized into two reaching bundles. Miller’s arrangement of the two works muffled the similarity of their shapes by inserting *Persephone* between them. *Persephone*’s presence diluted the works’ compositional similitude by separating them and by subsuming this resemblance within a broader matrix of stylistic likeness. When *Death Wish* and *Daphne* were surrounded by other gestural abstractions in “Sixteen Americans,” that is, the similarity of their forms appeared to be a byproduct of their shared expressionist process (i.e., the asymmetrical nature of their compositions signaled that they had evolved in relation to the support) rather than as a remnant of a more direct, possibly mimetic relationship between them.

By essentially isolating *Death Wish* and *Daphne* in the corner, DeFeo’s installation asserted a special affinity between them. By hanging them perpendicular to each other, however, her arrangement also asserted or, more accurately, physically reiterated their difference. The works’ spatial disjunction highlighted the distinctiveness of their media (as well as their contrasting frames) and gave this difference an oppositional feel: the predominately drawn *Death Wish* appeared to counter the predominately painted *Daphne*. In “Sixteen Americans,” this difference was swallowed up within a continuum of line quality that progressed – from *Death Wish* to *Daphne* at least – along a single plane. With their difference inserted into this incremental framework, the works seemed to be related via evolution rather than competition. In sum, DeFeo’s display presented *Death Wish* and *Daphne* as funhouse mirror images of each other; it created the impression that the viewer was seeing the same figure reflected through two distinct mediums.

Due to both the dynamic and pattern of similarity and difference it constructed between *Death Wish* and *Daphne*, DeFeo’s arrangement invited viewers to engage the two works very differently than did Miller’s display. Crowded into the corner, the works demanded that viewers scan back and forth between them. The proximity of both works to the corner meant that viewers had to regard them, to a certain extent, together; for, even if they tried to look at one canvas exclusively, the other would always be naggingly present in their peripheral vision. However, the pair’s perpendicular placement meant that viewers could not take them in simultaneously either; no matter how they positioned themselves, one work (and sometimes both) would always be slanting away. The corner encouraged viewers to actively shuttle their vision between *Death Wish* and *Daphne* by turning their heads or bodies. This to and fro perception was drastically different from the successive mode of looking prompted by Miller’s flowing arrangement.

DeFeo’s installation further encouraged viewers to adopt a comparative view by highlighting the similarity between the works’ compositions. Unlike stylistic similitude, the

---

132 This resemblance in shape is even stronger if the viewer imagines one of the works hanging upside down. DeFeo was apt to change the orientation of her works both during and after their production. For example, she flipped *Persephone* after it showed in “Sixteen Americans,” transforming it into *Bird of Paradise*. 

45
echoes of shape that the Dilexi display highlighted were concrete and specific likenesses – details which sight could lock onto and trace across different supports and media. These glimpses of repetition, in other words, invited viewers to suss out the resonances and divergences between *Death Wish* and *Daphne* by repeatedly looking from one to the other. Conversely, Miller’s organization of “Sixteen Americans” around the principles of cohesion and contrast discouraged comparison. The homogeneity of the works in each gallery and their unifying arrangement attuned viewers to the similarities between them, while the moments of dramatic contrast across galleries catalyzed the recognition of difference. Both dimensions of the viewing experience disallowed the kind of slow, extended unfolding of similarity and difference between works that DeFeo’s arrangement of *Death Wish* and *Daphne* incited.

Ultimately, DeFeo’s installation of the two works – and the viewing experience it promoted – fostered impressions of her artistic practice that could not have been gained from “Sixteen Americans.” Her display of *Death Wish* and *Daphne* shattered the illusion, crafted in the MoMA show, that she had created each work autonomously through exploratory mark-making. The pair’s echoing shapes read as remnants of reference and thus implied that the works were related mimetically. She appeared, that is, to have arrived at the form of each work in part through descriptive mark-making. Though the representational aspect of her process was not entirely legible from the display, it looked like the works had served, to a certain extent, as each other’s compositional templates. She seemed to have “restrained” automatism through description rather than by honing “discovered” forms. In this way, the artistic procedure that *Death Wish* and *Daphne* testified to in the Dilexi show differed dramatically from the abstract expressionist process they would soon project in “Sixteen Americans.” Furthermore, the taut energy that DeFeo’s arrangement staged between *Death Wish* and *Daphne* suggested that her creative process had unfolded across them in a way that differed from the serial in terms of both sequence and dynamic. The pair’s oppositional placement conveyed the sense that they had materialized through mutual contestation rather than harmonious succession, as they appeared to do at MoMA. Indeed, the generative tension that seemed to fuel DeFeo’s practice in the Dilexi show could not have been further from the impression of seriality fostered by Miller’s show.

Hanging in “Sixteen Americans,” *Death Wish* and *Daphne* each dramatized spontaneous self-creation – a subject which seemed to reiterate their expressionist production. The connotations of the works’ creation stories were tellingly different when DeFeo arranged them at the Dilexi. Straining against each other around the gallery’s back corner, the crucial drama of generation seemed to occur not within each work but across them. Each work, that is, no longer appeared to grow organically from its center outward; instead, each appeared to have been constructed from the outside in. Here, the metamorphosis that *Daphne* staged was merely a precursor to the change the figure underwent when translated onto a different support and into a different medium to become *Death Wish*, and vice versa. In the Dilexi show, then, the distinction between DeFeo’s metaphor of artistic production as metamorphosis and Abstract Expressionism’s creation *ex nihilo* was clear. For DeFeo, unlike for Newman, the generative act began with something – specifically, with another work; creation was not a process of autonomous formation but of *transformation* across disparate works and media. It was about becoming rather than being.

***

Many of the works that Miller rejected also hinted at the peculiar relational dynamic of DeFeo’s practice. Her diptych, *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, demonstrates, in a particularly pointed way, how the curator’s selection painted a misleadingly fragmentary picture of the
DeFeo displayed the diptych in a prominent location: it hung at the front of the gallery’s long western wall, just to the left of the entrance. Though there appears to have been no set path for visitors to take around the intimate gallery, *The Virgins* would have been a likely place for them to start. The work is partially visible behind the standing man in the photograph of DeFeo taken through the Dilexi’s front window, demonstrating that it was visible to pedestrians passing along Union Street.

*The Foolish Virgin*, the left-hand panel captured in the photograph, looked like it could have hung with DeFeo’s drawings in “Sixteen Americans.” Its particular formula of mixed-media and the slender format of its paper-mounted-on-canvas support signaled its kinship to *Death Wish, Daphne, and Persephone.*[^134] *The Foolish Virgin* also fit the specifications of Miller’s unspoken stylistic criteria. Its centered form resembled a flower in the same vague way that *Daphne* evoked the figure of its titular heroine. What is more, its loose brushwork and vigorous charcoal striations were as perceptually prominent as the flattened petals they strove to conjure. This gestural rendering acted with the form’s ambiguous spatiality to endow the image with a sense of dynamic emergence: matter appeared to bubble up from the central stem-slit and spread out across the support like flowing lava. If it had been separated from its twin and hung in “Sixteen Americans,” *The Foolish Virgin* would have testified to the same expressionist process that the other works in DeFeo’s gallery appeared to evidence.

By subsuming *The Foolish Virgin* within a diptych, however, DeFeo decisively squelched any illusion of its autonomous creation. The dyadic structure of *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* implied the pendants’ interdependent production, while the play of likeness and divergence between them conjured the dynamics of their joint creation. As with *Death Wish* and *Daphne,* the panels’ images mirrored each other, but the resemblance between the latter’s centered floral forms was much more acute than the echoes of shape across the gestural drawings.[^135] The pair seemed to share an underlying compositional structure – a spindly central “stem” topped by a heavy “head” of segmented, petal-like forms. This reiterated template forcefully conveyed the panels’ mimetic relationship. Like many of the works Miller rejected, the diptych also accustomed viewers to the possibility of mimesis by presenting a clearly representational image. In *The Wise Virgin,* the evocations of figuration that haunt the works Miller chose gave way to an unambiguous, naturalistic rendering of a rose. When *The Foolish Virgin* was paired with its illusionistic partner any inkling that DeFeo had simply happened upon its veneer of reference through expressionist mark-making disintegrated.

DeFeo’s presentation of *Death Wish* and *Daphne* created the impression that the viewer was seeing the same shape manifested in two distinct mediums. The panels of *The Wise and Foolish Virgins,* by comparison, seemed to present the same form, and its accompanying concept, rendered through contrasting processes. The delicate line and wash-like shading that carefully delineate *The Wise Virgin’s* layered petals signaled an extended, attentive process defined by the transformative use of materials to describe forms. *The Foolish Virgin* seemed to evidence a much freer manipulation of paint and charcoal that, in large part, acquiesced to the

[^133]: Unlike the other works discussed here, I have not seen *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* in person because it is housed in Norway as part of the Reider Wennesland Collection.

[^134]: The only difference being that *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* adds house paint to the list of oil, charcoal, and pencil. Though the exact dates and order in which DeFeo produced the four works is unknown, they are essentially contemporaries. In addition, the diptych’s biblical title (appropriate for its altar-friendly format) was literary and traditional like *Daphne* and *Persephone.*

[^135]: Moreover, the canvases’ identical formats, framing, and the fact that DeFeo hung them only a few inches apart would have made their similarities of shape seem more like repetitions than resonances.
physical properties of each medium. The canvas’ spackled surface and distended shapes indicated that DeFeo created it using a technique that was quicker, more energetic, and more intuitive than the procedure she applied to its more pictorial counterpart.136

When hung together as a diptych, then, The Wise Virgin and The Foolish Virgin each represented an opposite pole of style, process, and signification. In the work, figuration and abstraction, descriptive and exploratory mark-making, and iconicity and indexicality were separated out and laid side-by-side in a comparative, even competitive, way.137 This binary structure suggested that any evidence of blurring between the two categories – for example, the cohesiveness of The Foolish Virgin’s gestural form and the floral associations it evoked – had resulted from their reciprocal influence – from DeFeo playing the panels and their contrasting techniques off of each other. The diptych, that is, staged an interactive dynamic between “symbolism” and “expressionism” that was entirely illegible in “Sixteen Americans” because Miller chose works from one category exclusively.138 By segregating DeFeo’s gestural works (those that resembled The Foolish Virgin), Miller’s display created the impression that expressionism and symbolism – or, free and deliberate mark-making – were consecutive steps in the same process of honing “discovered” forms. The play between these two techniques (plus their accompanying aesthetic and communication styles) lost the oppositional, interactive quality evident in The Wise and Foolish Virgins. Thus, in “Sixteen Americans” DeFeo’s artistic practice looked serial: she appeared to apply the same procedure (e.g. tempered automatism) to each work in turn. In the Dilexi show, conversely, her practice looked relational: her artistic activity

136 Like most of DeFeo’s works from this period, both halves of the diptych communicated a sense of movement, but their divergent processes meant that they did so in very different ways. For The Wise Virgin, DeFeo used naturalistic depiction and illusionistic space to illustrate the action of blossoming. The rose appeared to thrust out of a crack in the support and spread out across the surface, its petals unfurling in thin layers from its conical center. (Smith also notes the sense of illusionistic emergence staged by The Wise Virgin (The Modern Moves West, 89).) This tromp’oeil play of surface and depth made the act of burgeoning palpable by conveying the impression that the flower was pushing through and against a physically resistant plane. This play also generated a striking sense of illusionistic space as the blossom seemed to spring out and project in front of both the picture plane and the support surface, which collapsed together behind the assertive bloom. The Foolish Virgin, by contrast, conveyed a sense of movement primarily through its gestural marks, which evidenced motion more than they represented it. Here, in other words, action chiefly belonged to the artist rather than the form. As in DeFeo’s other evocative abstractions, however, some of the marks’ dynamism rubbed off on the nascent figure, but the movement it staged was very different from The Wise Virgin’s slow, three-dimensional unfolding. The bold, vertical charcoal scribbles that marked the image’s upper “petals” and the wide swath of scrambling along its “stem” created the illusion that matter was erupting in flat, plume-like bursts out of the central crevasse. The growth it dramatized was, in short, more volcanic than vegetative.

137 As a diptych, The Wise and Foolish Virgins illustrated the oppositional dynamic between abstraction and figuration in a particularly explicit way. Most of the works Miller excluded, however, also suggested a contentious play between descriptive and non-representational mark-making. In The Eyes, for example, a regiment of heavy vertical lines traversed the drawing’s surface. They were a part of the grid that helped create the illusion of vertiginous spatial recession, but they also dissolved this illusionism literally, by slicing and piercing the monumental, mysteriously hovering image of the eyes. In doing so, these abstract marks drew attention to the drawing’s materiality like scratches on film. In The Eyes, line was both constructive of form and inimical to it.

138 Here, I employ the vocabulary DeFeo used to describe her art in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog. As we have already seen, her definitions of “symbolism” and “expression” were vague; however, both terms could conceivably apply to all three facets – style, process, and signification – of the contrasting aesthetic poles staged by The Virgin’s divergent panels.
appeared to weave between distinct works, pitting their incongruous styles, media, and processes against each other.\textsuperscript{139}

DeFeo’s installation of her more representational pieces, those which Miller snubbed, also allowed and, to a certain extent, encouraged viewers to regard them in relation to her gestural abstractions. Her display of the most referential works in the Dilexi show, her two collages, is a case in point. She hung \textit{Applaud the Black Fact} and \textit{Blossom} on either side of the partition that stood mid-way down and perpendicular to the gallery’s eastern wall (fig. 20). In part, this placement separated the photomontages from the other works, which snaked around the gallery’s perimeter, and, in doing so, physically reiterated the dramatic difference of their media (i.e., found images) and process (i.e., culling, cutting, and arranging) from the paintings and drawings.\textsuperscript{140}

The collages’ presence certainly seemed incongruous to the exhibition’s sole reviewer, Dean Wallace of the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, who saw them as not only unrelated but inferior

\textsuperscript{139} In a letter to Miller, DeFeo described a similarly integrated production process for \textit{The Jewel} and \textit{The Rose}: “I understand now why I haven’t been able to work on the Deathrose for some months – The Jewel is its counterpart, a life symbol – positive and convex visually – in contrast to the black and white concave death symbol. I must have both” (DeFeo, letters to Miller, undated, c. January 1960, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k). She described her practice as shuttling between the opposite poles that the two paintings embodied. Her creative capacity – her ability to develop aesthetic ideas and physically produce art – required that her production process hold these two works in tension.

Furthermore, the mode of looking encouraged by the diptych’s bipartite structure reinforced this account of her production by staging a fictional interaction between the two panels in the viewer’s perception. As a single work composed of two canvases, \textit{The Virgins} asked viewers to regard its halves both together and separately. In practice, this mixture of simultaneous and successive looking would have resulted in viewers toggling their attention back and forth across the coupled canvases. Like DeFeo’s arrangement of \textit{Death Wish} and \textit{Daphne}, then, the discrete yet dependent panels cultivated a comparative view. (As with \textit{Death Wish} and \textit{Daphne}, the diptych’s overall compositional structure of disturbed symmetry, of repetition and divergence, could easily have reinforced this comparative view by prompting gallery goers to search out the parallels and deviations between the two panels. Many of the works Miller rejected, most notably \textit{The Eyes}, also featured this compositional structure.) This pattern of perception sutured together the dynamic action conveyed by each panel into a single process of transformation. The resemblance between the two “roses” generated the impression that they represented the same image at different stages of becoming like montaged “before” and “after” shots. Like a flip-book, the comparative view reanimated this transformational process with its to-and-fro motion: scanning across the canvases activated their similarities and differences so that they read as change. For example, reading across the diptych’s span from \textit{The Wise Virgin} to \textit{The Foolish Virgin} generated the illusion that the subtle charcoal lines etching out the petals distended into frantic slashes spewing forth from the flower’s now-vacant center. Pulling back from this detail, \textit{The Foolish Virgin’s} gloppy oil paint appeared to dissolve \textit{The Wise Virgin’s} crisp rose into unruly matter, smashing and elongating its petals into an awkward double perspective like a cubist absinthe glass. Viewed in this order, then, the canvases’ emerging forms merged to perform an altogether different process – deformation. Of course, this “disintegration” was immediately reversed into “becoming” when the comparative view bounced back across the canvases in the opposite direction, from \textit{The Foolish} to \textit{The Wise Virgin} (Brigid Doherty, “Imaging Seeing,” \textit{Jay DeFeo: Works on Paper} (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1989), 31). As Smith has noted, the work’s floral motif gave this metamorphosis the feel of a life-cycle (Smith (2009), 89). The comparative view caught the image in a perpetual loop of “coalescence” and “dissolution” that kept the flower constantly fluctuating between “growth” and “decay” (Doherty, 35 and Smith, 93). The installation photographs of the Dilexi show reveal that DeFeo played with the panels’ order, suggesting that the sequence of their action was ambiguous in her eyes.

\textsuperscript{140} I have not identified the sources from which DeFeo extracted the reproductions that she used as collage materials in \textit{Applaud} and \textit{Blossom}. It was common for DeFeo and members of her circle, notably Bruce Conner and Wallace Berman, to use soft-core pornographic images from pin-up magazines in their art. She also made several photomontages in this period from snapshots of herself and her friends.
to the artist’s abstractions. After enthusing that her “large,” “non-representational” “pieces pack a tremendous wallop” through their “integration of balanced forces – imploding here, exploding there – and all controlled by an amazingly facile hand,” he slammed Blossom and Applaud in highly gendered terms:

In the collages, though, facility strives toward virtue and falls short of the mark. The work is professional but the technique is one that might better be left to amateurs – that of creating synthetic abstracts by pasting up magazine illustrations. Cuteness of this kind ill becomes an artist of De Feo’s [sic] power.

Wallace’s use of the terms “amateur” and “cute” to describe the collages codes them, disparagingly, as feminine and, thus, as less serious and significant than her dramatic, gestural abstractions. To a certain extent, DeFeo’s isolation of the collages – like Miller’s division of the artist’s works by media in “Sixteen Americans” – invited viewers to see them as different too.

Ultimately, though, this likeness to Miller’s display was superficial; for, the artist’s installation differed from the curator’s in two crucial ways. She hung the collages back-to-back rather than side-by-side, and she positioned them in the center of the gallery space so that they frequently jutted into the viewer’s line of sight. Together, these aspects of the installation made it easier to understand the photomontages in relation to other works in the gallery than in relation to each other. The display, in other words, facilitated comparisons between media and processes rather than within a single medium and technique; it highlighted difference more than it contained difference. Each collage’s prominent, exposed position meant that visitors could easily stumble upon lines of sight which juxtaposed Blossom or Applaud with works visible beyond the partition (as figure 20 demonstrates with Applaud, Young Bird of Paradise, and The Wise and Foolish Virgins). By slicing the already intimate space in half, the protruding partition also made it easier for viewers to compare each collage with works hanging with it in the same section of the gallery. This comparative viewing experience was more active as it required patrons to swivel their heads or pivot their bodies between parallel or perpendicular walls. In sum, rather than segregating the photomontages, DeFeo’s installation endowed them with a kind of generative presence.

Unlike the other examples explored here, the comparative view fostered by DeFeo’s display of the collages was not constrained by directly juxtaposed works. It had the potential to proliferate throughout the gallery, traversing space and diverse pieces. For example,

---

141 Dean Wallace, “S.F.’s Luck: Good Art at Half N.Y. Prices,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 27, 1959, clipping from the SFMoMA Archives, DeFeo File. Wallace’s review was part of his regular “Lively Arts” column. The provincial boasting in the title reflected his high praise for the show, which he referred to as an “exciting exhibit.” The fact that his write-up was published twenty days into the month-long exhibition testifies to the laxity of the San Francisco art world in this period.

142 Curiously, Wallace acknowledged the presence of only one representational work in the exhibition – The Eyes. His preference for DeFeo’s more abstract expressionist works aligns his taste with Miller’s.

143 An installation shot (fig. 20) taken from the back, eastern corner (probably from the office doorway), looking past the partition’s shadowed rear face towards the front of the gallery, captured the multiplicity latent in this oscillating look. Here, the top half of Applaud’s conglomerate body, which teetered like an imbalanced pinwheel atop a “tail” of torsos (fig. 21), rhymed with the segmented form of Young Bird of Paradise, partially and faintly visible to the partition’s right. This view also accentuated the similarity between Applaud’s roughly vertical, top heavy silhouette and The Virgin’s tapering twins. Every compositional echo invited viewers to read Applaud in light of a different connotation – to see in similes that perceptually morphed its monstrous amalgam from cruciform, to cantilevered, to floral. Blossom also resonated with different works within the front half of the gallery. The askew cross shape of its silhouette rhymed with the flattened, wing-like form of Annunciation (which, in turn, echoed the
Applaud’s central position revealed the similarities in shape between its off-kilter figure and that of Death Wish – which hung further down the western wall (outside of the photograph’s frame) – despite their startlingly disparate media, scales, and processes. This glimpse of likeness had the potential to prompt the viewer to look back and forth between the dissimilar works, excavating unexpected resonances between them. Rotating ninety degrees between the partition and the gallery’s back west corner, viewers could have noticed that the amputated shoulder of the twisting, shadow-striped torso in Applaud repeated the outline of Death Wish’s lower left-hand border. In turn, the drawing’s seemingly chaotic lines seemed to follow the curve of the nude’s breast and the abrupt cleaving of her body just below the hip. These resemblances continued in the works’ upper portions. The intersection of vertical and arcing bundles at the top of Death Wish mirrored the bisected and confusingly reassembled profile of a naked woman (a violence perhaps inspired by the centerfold of the source publication) that crowned Applaud’s heterogeneous figure.

This unfolding of similarity across the gallery accorded an archaeological valence to the comparative view. The process, that is, encouraged viewers to regard the unearthed fragments of likeness as clues pointing to the works’ mutual production – specifically, as evidence of their mimetic relationship. As with The Wise and Foolish Virgins, however, the data was inconclusive: the exact path that DeFeo’s artistic activity had taken between the works was indeterminate, leaving viewers to construct any number of narratives about it. The comparative view not only acted as a tool for analyzing DeFeo’s artistic practice; it also brought the play between the works to life. As it shuttled between the pieces, vision animated their repetitions and divergences, creating the illusion that body parts and abstract forms were mutating from one work to the next. Applaud’s vertical outstretched leg, for instance, appeared to morph into Death Wish’s spinal column, where it became sutured to the canvas’ edge rather than teetering aloft. The comparative view, in sum, harnessed both intellectual assessment and optical illusion, the force of fact and of fiction, to suggest the relational dynamic of DeFeo’s practice.

In the Dilexi show, the mimetic relationship between Applaud and Death Wish appeared to extend beyond form: they seemed to imitate each other’s media and procedures as well. For example, the collage exhibited some of the key effects of expressionist drawing. The shadow-striped torso – which, unlike the other photo-fragments, recalled a high art source, Man Ray’s Return to Reason (1923) – gave the montage an unexpected graphic quality. The lines cascading down the truncated nude emulated Death Wish’s fluid marks. They endowed Applaud’s composite figure with a sense of fluid motion and dynamic space endemic to drawing but foreign to photomontage; indeed, both qualities are usually inhibited by the medium’s piecemeal construction. The undulating shadows gave the fragmented body a sense of elongation. The torso appeared to push apart the two halves of the collage that it connected, sending its illusion of squashed, cleaved form of The Foolish Virgin across the gallery), which hung on the adjacent wall. However, the collage’s sense of swirling, outward motion – created by its radial composition of fragmented photographs which increased in scale from the center to the edges – seemed to echo The Wise Virgin. DeFeo used more delicate and fragmentary cutouts for Blossom than for Applaud as if she wanted the collage to “answer back” to drawing – as if, that is, she were striving to obtain a similar sense of fluidity, of motion, of transformation with montage as she could with drawing. Interestingly, this attempt brought out the alienating quality of photomontage: its fragmentation of bodies, its confusion of legibility and abstraction, negative and positive space, surface and illusion.

144 Of course, the fact that Applaud was composed of found images meant that the direction of influence was determinable for some details. For example, the semi-circle at the crux of the drawing’s bottom right-hand curve clearly mimicked the breast of the nude torso in Applaud and not the other way around.
motion rippling throughout the composite form. Despite the abruptness of their juxtaposition, the montaged legs seemed to sprout forth from the nude’s lopped brow like Athena from the head of Zeus or, more aptly, like Daphne’s crown of charcoal “branches.”

Death Wish likewise exhibited aesthetic qualities typical of photomontage. Choppiness and containment, two properties which the drawing possessed, are unavoidable characteristics of collage but generally alien to gestural drawing. “What would it look like,” Death Wish seemed to ask in the Dilexi show, “for a gestural drawing to play at being a collage?” By illuminating connections between diverse works, DeFeo’s display represented mimesis in a way that restored its performative connotations. Mimesis appeared to be a process not of replication but of transformation. Furthermore, when seen in light of Applaud, Death Wish’s incongruous mixture of erratic, fluid marks and deliberate, heavy lines suggested a conflicted production process – one which knitted together contradictory techniques. Since many of the drawing’s lines corresponded with shapes in the collage, the marks looked representational. DeFeo, that is, appeared to have made the drawing by infusing unrestricted mark-making with a characteristic element of montage procedure – working with “givens.” Death Wish seemed to import not only forms from Applaud, but aspects of its medium and process as well. Mimesis across these diverse works read as a kind of challenge: each appeared to force the other out of its comfort zone to experiment with new actions and effects.

The Dilexi show, in sum, created the impression that DeFeo’s creative activity was fueled by such contentious play – that she posed aesthetic problems and puzzled through them by bringing disparate works, media, and processes into dialogue with each other. Her artistic practice, it seemed, proceeded by crossbreeding alien works in contrast to the modernist series and postmodernist seriality, which proceeded by evolution and reproduction respectively. DeFeo’s display, in short, constructed an account of her practice that deviated drastically from the one Miller produced for “Sixteen Americans.” Her artistic actions appeared to spur mutation, translation, metamorphosis, transformation, and change, rather than repetition and continuity.

As Individuals and Americans

What factors led Miller to craft a representation of DeFeo’s artistic practice that differed so dramatically from the artist’s own? Though inquiries into intention inevitably involve speculation, the following analysis searches for clues in the broader context of “Sixteen Americans.” Examining DeFeo’s gallery in relation to the fifteen others that composed the show reveals that there was nothing exceptional about Miller’s curation of the artist’s works. Her ensemble was typical in terms of both its level and type of consistency. Each artist’s suite of works fluctuated very little in terms of media, and though the artistic actions represented in the exhibition as a whole ranged widely from Johns’ painstaking encaustic technique to Alfred
Leslie’s slapdash expressionist painting, this variety did not extend to the individual galleries, where each work appeared to have been produced with the same procedure, and shared a formal vocabulary. Each piece spoke with roughly the same lexicon of marks, lines, and shapes (for example, Mallary’s abused rectangles, Landes Lewitan’s biomorphic pictographs, Albert Urban’s hazy circles, etc.) As in DeFeo’s gallery, the homogeneity of each artist’s works (in terms of medium, process, and aesthetic) relegated difference to secondary formal variations—minor changes in color, shape, composition, format, and, sometimes, motif. Miller, in short, chose each artist’s works according to the same principle of coherence.

The decisions Miller made regarding the selection and arrangement of DeFeo’s works, then, followed the same curatorial principles applied to “Sixteen Americans” as a whole. These standards ensured that each artist was represented by a group of works that was just diverse enough to affirm the continuity between them. By calibrating the balance of similarity and difference within each gallery to reveal “variation,” Miller ensured that each ensemble allowed or, more accurately, encouraged viewers to effortlessly identify its unifying features. Any given gallery, that is, provided just enough variety for viewers to extract a seemingly rich understanding of the defining characteristics of the artist’s oeuvre. Miller, in sum, selected each artist’s works to codify his or her signature style or—since style was then becoming increasingly confused with media and process—trademark aesthetic strategy.

Miller’s division of the galleries complemented her aims since it helped to endow each artist with a distinctive “voice.” The porous enclosures that parceled up the exhibition space had the complex effect of both segregating the artists and contrasting them with each other. Partitions cloistered each artist’s works, allowing the viewer to engage them, for the most part, exclusively and without distraction. Gaps between the walls, however, let fragments of the surrounding galleries occasionally intrude into the viewer’s field of vision, interrupting his or her immersion with jarring juxtapositions. In this way, the exhibition’s layout punctuated the viewer’s experience of each artist’s works with dramatic moments of contrast—with sudden and startling eruptions of difference. An installation photograph of Kelly’s gallery models this view and demonstrates its effects (fig. 22). The incongruous sight of the mottled, fluid forms of *The Veronica* visible amid Kelly’s crisp, minimalist compositions cinches the formal cohesiveness of the latter group. The exotic presence of DeFeo’s lush, gestural painting also gives Kelly’s works a quality they could not convey on their own—distinctiveness. The unexpected confrontation between the two disparate styles makes them both seem singular and original.

Miller developed this formula for selection and display to convey a particular model of artistic identity—specifically, the concept of the artist as individual, which formed the ideological backbone of the “Americans” series. In her foreword to the “Sixteen Americans” catalog, the curator described the exhibition as continuing the series’ commitment to showcasing individual artists on their own terms:

---

148 Hedrick’s more eclectic ensemble was the telling exception to this rule.
149 Miller clustered Johns’ works by motif—targets, flags, and numbers—just as she grouped DeFeo’s works by medium.
150 Miller’s cohesive arrangement of DeFeo’s gallery was also fairly typical of the curator’s treatment of the show’s other artists working in two-dimensions. She occasionally “skied” one work in an ensemble. This technique of asymmetrical hanging—which she applied to Kelly’s, John’s, Mallary’s, and Hedrick’s galleries—was a staple of the exhibition language that Barr developed for the Museum in the early 1930s (Klonk, 171).
Differences rather than similarities . . . have been emphasized in these exhibitions at the Museum. . . . *Sixteen Americans* continues the pattern by bringing together distinct and widely varying personalities, contrasting these personalities sharply rather than attempting to unite them within any given movement or trend. These sixteen are presented as individuals and Americans.\(^{151}\)

Miller’s curatorial conventions realized the series’ goal, described here as presenting contemporary American artists “as individuals.” Her selection of homogeneous works from a diverse group of artists (a pattern physically manifested by the exhibitions’ “one artist per gallery” layout) strongly encouraged viewers to perceive each artist’s style as unique. Tellingly, though, Miller’s description acknowledged only half of her curatorial recipe. She stressed that the “Americans” shows were structured around contrast – that they emphasized “differences rather than similarities” between exhibited artists – but she was silent about her criteria (e.g. the principle of coherence) for choosing each artist’s works.

Miller had to withhold her selection criteria because she portrayed artistic individualism as a kind of negative exhibition principle. Unlike other “surveys of American art,” the “Americans” shows, she claimed, did not attempt to package their artists “within any given movement or trend.”\(^{152}\) Rather than subsume artists’ works within constructed aesthetic categories, MoMA’s shows, according to Miller, freed artists from any such impositions. “The purpose,” she explained in the “Twelve Americans” (1956) catalog was “to give each artist an opportunity to speak to the Museum’s public, in clear and individual terms, through a strong presentation of his work.”\(^{153}\) Here, Miller described the power of expression, the agency to create and convey meaning, as the prerogative of the artist exclusively, not the Museum. Rather than provide mediating interpretative frameworks, the shows guaranteed the sovereignty of each artist’s expression – its freedom from impinging contexts and criteria. Miller, in short, characterized the “Americans” exhibitions as passive platforms from which artists communicated directly to viewers. Her use of the word “personality” in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog to name the exhibition’s object is telling in this regard. By substituting a psychological term for an aesthetic one, she conflated style with selfhood, implying that the exhibition presented direct expressions of each artist’s autonomous and forcefully original subjectivity. As she described it, then, the series’ theme of the artist as individual was realized through curatorial abdication rather than action.\(^{154}\) In this way, the idea of artistic individualism was both a naturalizing and paradoxical exhibition principle for the “Americans” series.

As we have already seen, the concept of the artist as individual had a great deal of cultural currency in 1959. It stood at the intersection of MoMA’s cultural agenda and Cold War myths of American selfhood – a confluence most infamously manifested in “The New American Painting” exhibition. Barr opened his catalog essay with a proclamation of the artist’s autonomy that could easily have served as the epigraph for Miller’s description of “Sixteen Americans”: “Of the seventeen painters in this exhibition, none speaks for the others any more than he paints for the others. In principle their individualism is . . . uncompromising . . . . . For them, John


\(^{152}\) Ibid.

\(^{153}\) Quoted from Zelevansky, 58.

\(^{154}\) Several critics, including Tillim and Florence Berkman of the *Hartford Times* (excerpted in Museum of Modern Art Press Summary, No. 2), decried the exhibition’s framework of individualism for several reasons. One of their complaints was that it obscured the curator’s role and, by extension, the Museum’s power as an arbiter of taste.
Donne to the contrary, each man is an island.” Like Miller, Barr played down the exhibition’s power as a synthesizing and organizing frame to suit his insistence on the artists’ sovereignty and uniqueness. Both the “Americans” series and “The New American Painting” reflected the longstanding consonance between MoMA’s narrative of modern art and American liberalism. In *Spaces of Experience*, Charolette Klonk convincingly argues that, from the Museum’s inception in 1929, “Barr’s belief in personal freedom as necessary for artistic development was congenial to the conception of individuality, creativity and freedom that the businessmen who were trustees of the museum saw as prerequisites for a vigorous capitalistic society.” The display idiom that Barr developed in the early 1930s – the decontextualizing and “seemingly ‘neutral’” “white-cube” – articulated an aesthetic account of modernism (which Abstract Expressionism could easily be made to embody) in which artist, work, creative activity, and viewing experience were separate from life. By propagating “modernism’s aesthetic myths of genius, taste, and art as universal and timeless,” MoMA’s installation language also reinforced “liberal democratic ideals” of “modern subjecthood, chiefly autonomy, universal essence, and personal liberty.” In both its concept and design, then, the “Americans” series was a pure manifestation, even apotheosis, of the “white-cube” aesthetic and the intertwined aesthetic and nationalist ideologies that underwrote it.

In “Sixteen Americans,” Miller applied this exhibition formula to works and artists that rejected aesthetic modernism. As Preston noted, she featured works that strove “to come to terms with things outside themselves.” Some of these works, such as Rauschenberg’s “combine paintings,” opened up to the world materially and/or conceptually. Others, like Stella’s “black paintings,” evidenced processes that willfully negated the self-expressive potential of artistic action. Such works suggested artistic identities that diverged from the autonomous, sovereign (or, in Preston’s words, “egocentric”) self upheld by MoMA and its version of Abstract Expressionism. Miller’s attempt to diversify the “Americans” fare met with mixed success. Some critics complained that the Museum’s pristine look and the purely formalist attention it demanded were incompatible with the new, heteronomous works. “[Richard] Stankiewicz’s sculpture[s],” Hess grumbled, “do not look as well in these timeless evenly-painted walls and smooth lighting . . . Ellsworth Kelly’s big strict abstractions are also

155 Barr, 15.
156 For example, he emphasized the “variety” of the show’s paintings (17) and the artists’ dislike of “labels” and “the words ‘movement’ and ‘school’” (16). The nature of “The New American Painting,” however, required that, unlike Miller for “Sixteen Americans,” he define some broad aesthetic commonalities uniting the featured artists.
157 Many of the traits of “The New American Painting” evince its direct descent from the “Americans” series, including its neutral title, catalog format, and unequivocal presentation of the artists as individuals.
158 Klonk, 154.
159 This revisionist account of MoMA’s installation style is widely accepted (see, for example, Klonk; Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); and Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 17). This discourse developed out of radical cultural criticism of the 1970s, such as Peter Bürger’s influential investigation of modernism’s ideological underpinnings (*Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1984)) and the institutional critique movement, for which MoMA served as the epicenter in the late 1960s.
160 Quoted from Staniszewski, 70, 73, and 293.
161 The tie between the series and the New York art market was another obvious reason for Miller to curate the exhibition so as to codify each artist’s signature style. Her curation conventions could be seen as an exercise in branding – in turning each artist into an aesthetic sign that dealers and collectors could instantly recognize and, in turn, increasing the exhibition’s sales and the value of the Museum’s collection.
162 Preston.
penalized by their setting and its aura of sanitary shock.”\textsuperscript{163} Though the physical and conceptual frames Miller had established for the “Americans” series were stressed by these postmodern works, they could still support them.\textsuperscript{164} The innovative materials and artistic actions that works such as Stankiewicz’s constructions and Kelly’s hard-edge paintings evidenced were visible, if not optimally so, in “Sixteen Americans.” MoMA’s concept of the artist as individual was capacious enough to encompass works that rejected artistic genius and autonomy, as long as the Museum could frame these rejections as original aesthetic moves.

DeFeo’s example suggests that while the exhibition’s frame could encompass many types of artistic process, it could represent only a small range of artistic practices.\textsuperscript{165} Miller’s imperative that each gallery express a signature style created the impression that all of the artists produced their works in a more or less serial fashion. Ironically, the unspoken conventions she developed to portray the artists as individuals homogenized her representation of their creative practices. Canaday described this impression of uniform seriality in one of several scathing articles he wrote about “Sixteen Americans”:

Furthermore, from the evidence of the sixteen young Americans so handsomely displayed, painters are less interested in creating independent works of art than in the total effect of a series of variations on a theme they have staked out for their own, variations that must be seen as an ensemble if they are to be effective individually. By the same evidence, museums where contemporary art is exhibited plan their shows on similar premises, as they are forced to do by the nature of the material they must work with.\textsuperscript{166}

Here, Canaday appeared to unquestioningly accept that the exhibition was a passive mirror for a new trend towards serial practice; he did not, that is, entertain the possibility that this impression (i.e., the reduction of difference between the works in each gallery to “variation”) could be, in part at least, a construct of the curatorial process. Unlike the stifling effect of MoMA’s sterile design on the postmodern works in the show, Miller’s conventions for the selection and installation of the individual galleries and their potentially distorting effects on the portrayal of artistic practice were undetectable. It is telling in this regard that Canaday read the impression of serial practice created by the exhibition as consonant with artistic individualism, even as he bemoaned the loss of the autonomous artwork.

Conditions and Correspondence

This chapter has explored the conditions of visibility for DeFeo’s creative activity in “Sixteen Americans” beyond The Rose’s absence. I engaged the overlooked details of Miller’s representation of the artist’s works to articulate the specificity of DeFeo’s difference – the limits of her practice’s legibility within MoMA’s physical and ideological frameworks. This exercise has shown that DeFeo’s works could accommodate the Museum’s ideology of the artist as individual; however, this frame supported only a partial and distorting, not to mention unsuccessful (given the paucity of critical interest that it generated), view of her art. The Dilexi show suggests that DeFeo’s artistic activity unfolded in a way that differed dramatically from the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hess, 57.
\item This strain between the claims that the exhibition made about the works (how it assumed them to communicate) and the works themselves likely contributed to MoMA’s decision to dissolve the series in 1963.
\item As discussed earlier, I define “process” as the sequence of procedures that an artist uses to produce a single work, while I define “practice” as the way in which an artist’s aesthetic ideas and actions unfold across multiple works.
\item Canaday, “Evolution of the Public.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
modernist series and postmodernist seriality, the modes of production manifested by Miller’s curatorial conventions. Miller’s selection and display principles could not accommodate the diversity and relational dynamic of DeFeo’s creative practice as it appeared in the Dilexi show. The script of creativity conjured by the San Francisco show proposed a model of artistic identity that embraced multiplicity and interaction, traits which MoMA’s reductionist individualism foreclosed. I believe the Dilexi show articulated a production principle that DeFeo had been developing since she moved to the Fillmore District, where her more traditional abstract-expressionist practice mutated in the context of the neighborhood’s close-knit arts community. The remainder of the dissertation examines the aberrations that creative practice and identity underwent in the Fillmore’s hothouse of artistic activity.

A card that DeFeo sent to Miller nearly a year after “Sixteen Americans” opened hints at the social foundations of her relational practice. In the card, DeFeo reflected on her decision not to show The Rose and attempted to justify its continued confinement to her studio. She framed the dilemma in terms that blur affect and aesthetics, subject and object, artist and work. “It’s [sic] such a beautiful idea – it will be so hard for me to give it up,” she confessed. “I know this sounds corney [sic] but even though its [sic] always going to be a part of me somehow – I don’t know – just giving up this material object will be unbearable.” She described herself as caught in the painting’s gravitational field, the mystical yet very material magnetism which kept so many artworks and members of the Fillmore community orbiting around it. Though DeFeo felt the inevitable pull of the public sphere, The Rose’s force was – for the time being, at least – more powerful. Perhaps DeFeo sensed that the curator, viewing the situation from her remote perspective, would only be able to see the losses incurred by the painting’s confinement in the artist’s studio, not the gains it enabled; or so her inclusion in this letter of a chunk of paint that had come loose from The Rose’s constantly transforming surface might suggest (fig. 23).

Isolated against a sheet of white paper pasted on a large black card, the sparkling sculptural chip radiates a strange alien presence. It is a relic, a part-object, and an astral fragment – proof of life beyond the solar system of the New York art world. With this small gift, DeFeo included Miller within the constellation of relationships that The Rose held aloft, luring her to its distant center.

---

167 The first works DeFeo upon moving into her Fillmore studio were her “Mountains” series, a set of gestural, amorphous works. At this time, both her artistic process and practice seemed entirely abstract expressionist.

Figure 1
Reproduction of *The Rose* in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog
(New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959)
Figure 2
Jay DeFeo and two unidentified men in the Dilexi Gallery
Photographer unknown
1959
Gelatin silver copy print
7 x 5 inches
Courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 3
Diagram of Jay DeFeo’s exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery, 1959
Figure 4: Works in Jay DeFeo’s exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery, 1959

1. *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, 1958, 129 ¼ x 42 ½ inches, oil, house paint, charcoal and graphite on paper mounted on canvas (Kristiansand Katedralskole, Norway)

2. *Doctor Jazz*, 1958, 132 x 41 ½ inches, oil on paper (Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art)


5. *Tear*, 1959, 51 x 44 inches, graphite on canvas mounted on board (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles)

6. *The Annunciation*, 1957-59, 120 ¾ x 74 ½ inches, oil on canvas (Chicago Art Institute)

7. *Persephone*, 1957, 88 x 41 inches, oil, graphite, and charcoal on paper mounted on canvas (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles)


10. *Landscape with Figure*, c. 1955, 25 ½ x 21 ¼, oil and mixed media on canvas (private collection)

11. *Young Bird of Paradise*, c. 1957, 48 x 36, graphite on paper mounted on paper (location unknown)

12. *Prologue to the Rose*, 1956, 108 x 18, graphite and tempera on paper (location unknown)

13. Quote from poem by Philip Lamantia (*The Eyes*), 1958, 49 x 96 inches, graphite and charcoal on paper mounted on canvas (Whitney Museum of American Art)

14. Quote from poem by William Blake (*Song of Innocence*), 1957, 40 x 40, oil on canvas (The Jay DeFeo Trust)
Figure 5: Works in Jay DeFeo’s gallery at “Sixteen Americans,” MoMA, 1959-1960

1. *The Veronica*, 1957, 132 x 42 ½ inches, oil on canvas
   (The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

2. *Origin*, 1956, 92 x 79 ¾ inches, oil on canvas
   (The Berkeley Art Museum)

3. *Daphne*, 1958, 106 x 42 inches, charcoal, graphite and oil on paper
   mounted on canvas (Norton Simon Museum of Art)

4. *Persephone*, 1957, 88 x 41 inches, oil, graphite and charcoal on paper
   mounted on canvas (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles)

5. *Death Wish*, 1958, 89 x 43 ¼ inches, charcoal, graphite oil on paper
   mounted on canvas (Whitney Museum of American Art)
Figure 6
Diagram of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans,” MoMA, 1959-1960
Figure 7
Installation view of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” showing Origin (1956), Death Wish (1958), and Persephone (1957)
Soichi Sunami
1959
7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches
Figure 8
Installation view of Jay DeFeo’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” showing *Daphne* (1958) and *The Veronica* (1957) with Louise Nevelson’s gallery visible in the background
Soichi Sunami
1959
7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches
Figure 9
Installation view of Jim Jarvaise’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans”
Soichi Sunami
1959
7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches
Figure 10
Installation view of Frank Stella’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” with Jim Jarvaise’s works visible in the background
Rudy Bruckhardt
1959
7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches
Figure 11

*Daphne*

Jay DeFeo

1958

Charcoal, graphite and oil on paper mounted on canvas (border of paint and tape not shown)

106 x 42 inches

Norton Simon Museum of Art
Figure 12
*Origin*
Jay DeFeo
1956
Oil on canvas
92 x 79 ¾ inches
The Berkeley Art Museum
Figure 13

Death Wish
Jay DeFeo
1958
Charcoal, graphite and oil on paper
89 x 43 ¼ inches
The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 14
*The Veronica*
Jay DeFeo
1957
Oil on canvas
132 x 42 ½ inches
The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Figure 15

*Persephone*

Jay DeFeo

1957

Graphite, charcoal, and oil paint on paper mounted on canvas

88 x 41 inches

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Figure 16
Apollo and Daphne
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
1622-25
Marble
88 x 41 inches
Galleria Borghese, Rome
**Figure 17**

*Onement I*

Barnett Newman

1948

Oil on canvas

27 ¼ x 16 ¼ inches

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Figure 18
View of *Landscape with Figure* (c. 1955), *Death Wish* (1958), and *Daphne* (1958) installed in the Dilexi Gallery
Photographer unknown
1959
35mm slide
7/8 x 1 5/8 inches
Courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 19
*The Wise and Foolish Virgins*
Jay DeFeo
1958
Oil, house paint, charcoal, and graphite on paper mounted on canvas
Two canvases of 129 x 42 ½ inches
The Kristiansand Cathedral School, Norway
Figure 20
View of Applaud the Black Fact (1958), The Wise and Foolish Virgins (1958), and Bird of Paradise (c. 1957) installed in the Dilexi Gallery
Photographer unknown
1959
Gelatin silver print
10 x 8 inches
Courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 21

*Applaud the Black Fact*
Jay DeFeo
1958
Collage on paper mounted on painted canvas
51 x 36 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Figure 22
Installation view of Ellsworth Kelly’s gallery in “Sixteen Americans” with Jay DeFeo’s *The Veronica* (1957) visible in the background
Soichi Sunami
1959
7 ¼ x 9 ½ inches
Figure 23
Card sent by Jay DeFeo to Dorothy Miller which includes a piece of *The Rose* (1958-64), December 18, 1960
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: The Dorothy C. Miller Papers, I.15.k
Chapter 2

“The Individual and his World”:
Representing the Fillmore circle to the postwar public

The Artist as Individual with a Difference

In the spring of 1959, as Miller was gearing up for “Sixteen Americans,” she received a press release for a travelling group show titled “The Individual and his World.” “All artists are individuals,” it began.

Some, however, find themselves as individuals in a more lonely place, and seem to discover themselves to be more often upon those peaks in Darien which the rest of us view through them with only the wildest surmise. This exhibition includes painting and sculpture by ten individuals of unusual and remarkable direction. The work of each is accompanied by several photographs of the artist in his world. The photographs help to make clear the natural and logical development of the art from the artist’s personal environment and his reaction to it. Fee $75.169

The bottom of the announcement listed the ten participating artists in alphabetical order: Jeremy Anderson, Joe Botherton, Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo, Helen Dunham, Art Grant, Wally Hedrick, Arthur Holman, Seymour Locks, and David Simpson. The exhibition was prepared by the San Francisco Art Bank, an organization whose administrator and curator, Fred Martin, had served as Miller’s guide to the city’s art scene the previous summer. It was on his studio tour that she visited DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment and first encountered The Rose. Martin was an old friend of DeFeo’s; the two were undergraduates together at the University of California, Berkeley in the late 1940s. In addition to his administrative duties, Martin was a practicing artist. Though living in Oakland, he frequently showed at the 6 and other Fillmore area galleries. Nearly half the artists Martin selected for “The Individual and his World” (Conner, DeFeo, Hedrick, and Simpson) lived in the neighborhood, and several others (notably, Anderson and Locks) regularly exhibited there.

Though Martin curated eight travelling exhibitions for the Art Bank in 1959, he appears to have sent Miller information about “The Individual and his World” exclusively.170 This circumstance suggests that factors other than his responsibility to promote the Art Bank motivated his decision to send Miller this particular press release. Perhaps he sent her the announcement in recognition of the show’s likeness to the one she was currently organizing at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Not only were the “The Individual and his World” and “Sixteen Americans” almost exactly contemporary (the former debuted at The California College of Fine Arts (CSFA) a week before the latter opened), both featured works by DeFeo and Hedrick – a point which Martin repeatedly extolled in letters to potential Art Bank clients.171 Their conceptual consonance was also striking: both were group exhibitions organized around the idea of the artist as individual.

170 This assumption is based on the fact that the press release for “The Individual and his World” is the only Art Bank material contained in Miller’s file at The MoMA Archives.
For all their similarities, however, aspects of Martin’s show diverged decisively from Miller’s and may have struck the New York curator as curious. According to Miller, the artists in “Sixteen Americans” were individuals because they fervently exercised their creative autonomy – a demonstration of freedom which exemplified “Americanness.” Martin appropriated John Keats’ spatial and imperialist image of Romantic genius (Hernán Cortés surveying the Pacific from the “peaks in Darien”) to characterize the artist’s individualism, by contrast, as the defining difference of his subject position. The elevated status and stance of Keats’ artist-adventurer, and the sublime view they afforded, situated him outside the purview of group identity. A new set of expectations about the artwork followed from Martin’s redefinition of the artist as individual. The press release implied that the exhibition’s avant-garde (a military metaphor which Keats’ poem literalized) works presented a challenge to public communication. As expressions of the artist’s “unusual and remarkable direction,” the artworks were inscrutable – objects of the viewer’s “wildest surmise.” Here, the originality that Miller celebrated in the artworks of “Sixteen Americans” ventured into obscurity. Distinctiveness teetered into difficulty.

Furthermore, Miller would likely have found Martin’s installation unthinkable. Her design choices for “Sixteen Americans” (i.e., the “white cube” aesthetic and one-artist-per-gallery rule) were calculated to communicate the sovereignty of each artist’s expression. The gallery appeared to be a site that erased context, ideally enabling the viewer’s direct and purely aesthetic experience of the works. Martin’s version of artistic individualism required a much more active frame: the exhibition apparatus had to facilitate the viewer’s comprehension of the opaque works. In “The Individual and his World” this supplement assumed the form of photographs – taken and arranged on twenty-four by twenty inch panels by San Francisco photographer Jerry Burchard – of each artist’s “personal environment” (i.e., his or her home and/or studio) (figs. 1-9). As if preemptively responding to Thomas Hess’s critique of MoMA’s quarantine effect, Martin inserted the context of production – via photographic proxies – into the gallery. He swapped all pretense of direct engagement for a declaratively mediated experience of the works. His installation mobilized a viewing process that spanned media and

---

172 Martin referenced Keats’ 1816 sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.” His appropriation diverged from its nineteenth-century source in its placement of the viewer. Keats’ poem was, first and foremost, a testimony to the transporting effects of the artwork. In it, he describes how the act of hearing George Chapman’s translation of Homer opened up unknown worlds (“new planets” and “wide expanses”) to rove with his mind’s eye – providing a more vivid experience than had he left the walls of his room. Keats charts his transformation, catalyzed by Chapman’s verse, from reader to discoverer to author. The artwork (appropriately, here, a work that is the product of iteration and translation) is an object of inspiration that closes the looping circuit between author and reader, creator and beholder. It is a conduit through which the transcendent experience of the author passes to the reader – an event which may, in turn, spark a new cascade of creativity. Martin’s re-imagining of the scene forcefully separated the positions of artist and viewer that Keats conflated. In his retelling, the artist alone is Cortés, and the viewer assumes a subordinate position in both space and status. Martin relegated the viewer to a post below the peak, severing her view of the panorama and consonance with the artist’s majestic perspective. Cast as a native guide or one of Cortés’ minions, the viewer becomes the artist’s Other; the viewer’s bafflement (her thwarted gaze) serves to confirm the authority and uniqueness of the artist’s privileged vision. Martin’s recasting of Keats’ allegory reversed its meaning: rather than illustrate art’s revelatory power, it stages the artwork’s opacity – the imperfection of its communication, its failure to bridge the distance between artist and viewer. Barred from the promontory, the viewer scrutinizes the artist, hoping (somewhat pathetically) to glean from his reaction clues to the unseen landscape below. As I will discuss below, Martin’s manipulation of Romanticism was very much of its day.

173 The photo-panels were recently recovered by Burchard, who shared them with me as digital images. Unfortunately, Arthur Holman’s panel is missing.

visual languages in which abstract paintings and sculptures and representational photographs mingled in the viewer’s perception and consciousness. Ideally, the viewer’s frustrated aesthetic experience of the works was routed through and enabled by the knowledge the photographs provided.

In sum, “The Individual and his World” spoke to period cultural ideals represented in “Sixteen Americans” – chiefly, the concept of the artist as individual and the related notion that art derives from private experience. Martin’s introduction of photographs into the display of works, however, suggested a shift away from MoMA’s aestheticist account of these ideas. Indeed, the brief statement he sent Miller forced autonomy, expressionism, and genius to accommodate new and seemingly contradictory meanings. In the final lines of the notice which addressed the photographs, the artist’s “world” – the private realm his art manifested – morphed from a sublime interior vista into the concrete and mundane space of his “personal environment.” The supposedly transcendent domain of the artist’s psyche collided and conflated with the domestic sphere. Creation, likewise, transformed from an unfathomable visionary phenomenon into a “natural and logical” process laid bare by photography.

This chapter describes the perplexing model of artistic identity and creative practice produced in “The Individual and his World.” I approach this task comparatively. To home in on the exhibition’s specificity and historical meaning, I locate it within a matrix of representational conventions, display practices, and discourses that developed around the concept of artistic individualism (and abstract painting) in the 1950s. My analysis focuses on Burchard’s photo-panels because they offer the richest evidence of this largely-forgotten and poorly-documented show. I find that, unlike other period photographs used to supplement “difficult” artworks, Burchard’s emphasized the artist’s difference, and thus affirmed the exhibited works’ inscrutability. This perplexing finding motivates two subsidiary, and more speculative, lines of inquiry that weave through the chapter. One traces the exhibition’s political implications. As discussed in chapter one, the concept of artistic individualism was firmly tied to postwar debates about the relation of self and society. My comparative analysis recovers a sense of the exhibition’s politics by studying how it appropriated contemporary cultural forms for posing and working through questions of identity and belonging. The other speculative thread explores the exhibition’s conditions of production. It examines the institutional and art-world contexts in which Martin conceived “The Individual and his World” for clues to what motivated his, at times peculiar, curatorial choices.

175 My literature review has turned up only passing mentions of “The Individual and his World.” Though the photo-panels have never been reproduced, some of the photographs Burchard took for the exhibition have been published individually. I have not been able to locate installation shots of the exhibition, and, due to the obscurity of the featured artists, I have been able to assemble only a partial mock up of the exhibited works. Various incarnations of “The Individual and his World” included the following works: Anderson, Untitled, redwood sculpture; Botherton, Chilkat, tempera and Chinese ink, and Pequod, Chinese ink; Conner, Untitled, oil, Saint Barney Google, collage, and Super Human Devotion, collage; DeFeo, Landscape with Figure, oil, and The Wise and Foolish Virgins, drawings; Dunham, Oval, oil, and Peopled, oil; Grant, Adam, Eve, wood, and Samson, Delilah, wood and metal; Hedrick, Heroic Image, oil, Peace, oil, That True Religion, oil, For Services Rendered, oil, Mother and Child, oil, and Think, oil; Holman, Field, oil, Third Force, oil, and Under Sea, book; Locks, Spiral Post, wood, steel, and glass; Simpson, Floating White Stripe, oil, and 10 A, oil (list compiled from insurance forms for showings at Louisiana State University and San Francisco State University, AB file, SFAI Archives).
The Art Bank and its Virgilian Administrator

“The Individual and his World” was part of the first round of travelling group exhibitions produced by the Art Bank. The organization was founded and sponsored by the San Francisco Art Association (SFAA), the city’s long-standing professional organization of visual artists, in September 1958 with the aid of a $15,000 seed grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. At the time, SFAA also organized an annual juried exhibition and ran CSFA. The school’s Russian Hill campus housed the Art Bank offices. The Bank was an innovative response to the city’s lack of a developed critic-dealer system. Its purpose was to compensate for the feebleness of the local art market by marketing Bay Area artists nationally. As the head of the SFAA’s promotional wing, Martin’s job was to get the works of participating artists’ into museum exhibitions, onto collector’s walls, and into dealers’ inventory books.

To achieve these goals, the Art Bank performed two functions – savings and loan. Each artist “deposited” two works in the CSFA’s Diego Rivera Gallery, which effectively served as the organization’s “vault.” This repository (which acted like a dismantled reserve of the Association’s annual exhibition) stood in for the commercial gallery as a venue for local contemporary art. Its contents were “available for loan to qualified institutions.” Martin opened the vault, by appointment, to “visiting dignitaries” – i.e., “travelling curators, critics, museum directors, and collectors” – and was on hand to arrange “studio visits for persons wishing a closer acquaintance with the work of individual artists.” This “introduction service” was supposed to give the city’s scattered and largely underground art world an accessible center and the appearance, at least, of order and office.

Martin also publicized the artists via a yearly booklet that was sent to “major museums, libraries, colleges and universities in the United States.” It included the names and biographies of every Art Bank member and thumbnail reproductions of their works. The booklet also served as a catalog for the organization’s travelling group exhibitions, which were themselves a vital promotional tool. The publication contained a description of each show that listed the featured artists and the pages on which to find their works and biographies. Ideally, this structure allowed the reader (hopefully, a potential patron) to assemble a rough mental prototype of each exhibition. Since every artist had to be included in an exhibition, curating the touring series was no small task. In 1959, Martin fit the Art Bank’s approximately two-hundred artists into eight shows that ranged in size from ten to sixty-two works. He advertised the shows as contemporary art ready-mades – pre-packaged “exhibitions of contemporary painting


177 Although it speaks of loaning out works to other institutions, The Art Bank’s literature does not explicitly use the term “savings and loan” to characterize its operations.

178 "What the Art Bank is . . .," A Catalog of the Art Bank, 4.

179 Martin interview 2009.

180 "What the Art Bank is . . ."

181 Ibid.

182 Ibid. The Art Bank catalog was produced on occasion of the SFAA annual and also served as its exhibition guide. Burchard frequently did copy work for the catalog.

183 These statistics derive from the 1959 catalog. For some exhibitions, Martin allowed hosting institutions to choose from an array of artists, and some shows, including “The Individual and his World,” had multiple iterations.
and sculpture that will be interesting and stimulating, of high quality and educational value, yet low in cost” – perfectly suited to the programming and budgetary needs of regional “museums and galleries, college and university art departments, and larger city libraries.”

Like the Dilexi Gallery, the Art Bank was an institution that both manifested and helped to usher in the San Francisco art world’s transition into a commercial age. It served as a stopgap between artists’ evolving expectations that they should be able to earn a living from the sale of their works, on the one hand, and, on the other, the development of a local infrastructure to realize this prospect. Yet mediating between artists and market was not an easy task. The result was an ungainly, and ultimately unsustainable, hybrid. In its operations and self-conception, the organization straddled two distinct moments of the city’s art world – its collectivist past, symbolized by the SFAA, and its “for profit” future. The strange name “Art Bank” evidenced this crisis of identity. It offered a metaphor that could be interpreted either financially – that is, in terms of the art market (a reading enthusiastically performed in a 1962 *San Francisco Chronicle* article titled “Art in the Bank”) – or in terms of communal security (as when Gordon Washburn, writing in the 1959 catalog, likened the organization to “a blood bank” on the grounds that each provided “an especially valuable source of health to the community.”)

The photographs published with the *Chronicle* article also captured the tension within the Art Bank between market competition and the SFAA’s democratic ethos (fig. 10). The images treat the reader as a “visiting dignitary” touring the vault with Martin. The upper shot stages the selection process. A suited white man standing close to the lens acts as the viewer’s surrogate. He points to the works that Martin has pulled out of the chaos of hung and stacked canvases, the backdrop of Rivera’s trompe l’oeil mural, *The Making of a Fresco* (1931), exaggerating the shot’s deep space. In the lower photograph, a crush of works inundates Martin. He stares out forlornly from a clutch of sculptures that hem in his body. He appears overwhelmed and incapacitated, both physically and mentally, by the sheer number of works in the vault. The inclusivity of the Art Bank’s holdings, that is, seem to present an insurmountable obstacle to the selection process he facilitates above. Martin later recalled how the strain between individual achievement and group allegiance mounted within the Art Bank as local opportunities for financial success grew in the early 1960s, catalyzing the organization’s collapse around 1965:

[T]he whole Art Bank fell to pieces because of this change in the art world. There were galleries. And all the good artists went to the gallery, leaving us with all the people who couldn’t go anywhere else and they were all mad because they weren’t going anywhere and it was all my fault. So there was a big row and I was going to be fired for playing favorites.

As a member of the insular Fillmore community and publicist to its artists, Martin occupied a unique dual position within the city’s developing cultural landscape. A faux memo by Hedrick and Ralph Putzker, a fellow instructor at CSFA, spoke to the curator’s bifurcated identity. In the document, the authors express their gratitude to the Art Bank even as their
language – a deflating parody of legalese which displays Hedrick’s penchant for irreverent wordplay – pokes fun at the officialdom of Martin’s post:

To: Mr. Fred Martin  
Subject: Art Bank Travelling shows  
Whereas, to wit being witless and of not too sound mind and/or body, we, the undersigned, herein after known as ‘us’, have, by mutual consent and free will, come to the conclusion that you, F. Martin, hereinafter known as ‘you’, have done, are doing, will be doing and will have done one hell of a good job working with a bunch of slobs hereinafter known as ‘painters’, and the catalogue, announcement, prospectus, baited hook and/or throwaway, complete with intelligible English, a striking lack of current purple prose, a sensitive layout and an intelligent and astute division and description of current works – anyhow, you deserve a PAT ON THE BACK, which is hereby administered by us.  

Hedrick and Putzker’s use of a verb usually associated with institutional action (“administer”) in relation to a casual social gesture (“pat on the back”) humorously inserted their personal relationship with Martin into the document’s labored performance of their legal relationship. The distinct identities (i.e., Art Bank administrator and subcultural practitioner) perversely conflated in this farcical “thank you” also merged in Martin’s role as tour guide. Like Virgil in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Martin mediated between levels of the San Francisco art world. He used his intimate knowledge to ferry officials through its otherwise unnavigable underground.

“The Individual and his World” spoke to Martin’s particular experience of the San Francisco scene. Both its design and concept were exceptional among the travelling shows of 1959. It was the only exhibition to include materials other than artworks, and the only one organized around an extra-aesthetic theme. Martin structured the other seven shows by formal criteria – grouping artists according to pre-existing categories of genre (landscape, scenes of everyday life, and figuration), style (Abstract Expressionism and Cubism), and medium (printmaking and sculpture). By contrast, the theme of “The Individual and his World” (artistic individualism) did not correlate to a set of unified, objectively determinable formal or material qualities, freeing Martin to select artists of his choosing. He appears to have based his decisions largely on non-aesthetic criteria since each artist – except the three assemblagists (Conner, Grant, and Locks) – produced works that could have easily fallen within the rubric of another show. His reasons for deeming these particular artists exceptionally individualistic are thus invisible and difficult to recover. Whatever Martin’s rationale for picking them, the subjective process veered sharply from his expedient, almost mechanical, curation of the other travelling shows. He later confessed that of the eight exhibitions he organized in 1959 “The Individual and his World” “was the one I care[d] about the most.”

---

187 Wally Hedrick file, SFAI Archives.  
188 These exhibitions were: “Landscape Painting Today,” “The Artist Looks at Us,” “Contemporary Figurative Painting,” “Abstract Expressionism in the West,” “The Geometry of Creation,” “Bay Area Prints 1959,” and “Sculpture in the San Francisco Art Association.”  
189 I came to this conclusion by reviewing the works of the artists included in each show that were reproduced in the 1959-60 catalog. Given that the reproductions are black-and-white thumbnails, I could not take into consideration scale, color, and, to some extent, materials. Unlike Miller, Martin did not shy away from DeFeo’s and Hedrick’s more idiosyncratic (i.e., not strictly abstract) works.  
190 Probable influencing factors include Martin’s personal relationships with the artists and his knowledge of how their works were received in past annuals. It is also possible that heterogeneity was Martin’s key selection criterion.  
191 Martin interview 2009.
Burchard’s photo-panels combined the Art Bank’s savings and loan functions by staging virtual tours of the artists’ domestic studios for remote audiences. They enacted a practice that testified to the studio’s special significance as a site of reception in San Francisco and that emblematized Martin’s particular involvement in the city’s art scene. Like the Art Bank’s “introduction service,” the photographs were supposed to provide a context of acquaintance. “We have tried . . . to build an exhibition,” Martin explained in the Art Bank catalog, “which would help to bridge the gap between the usual conception of art and the most distant points of personal involvement in art. The photographs are of great significance in making this bridge and in forming an idea as to the personality of the artist.”192 By elucidating each artist’s character, idiosyncratic practice, and private production site, the panels ideally enabled viewers to comprehend the exhibition’s extremely “personal” works. The photographs, in other words, mediated between exotic work and bewildered beholder by acclimatizing the latter to the former’s native habitat. This process of familiarization would hopefully enable viewers to assimilate the works’ alien aesthetic into “the usual conception of art” – thus averting the avant-garde’s proverbial “shock effect.” “We were quite aware in organizing the exhibition,” Martin assured a wary venue representative, “that there was a need to present as intelligibly and as sympathetically as possible the more ‘far out’ type of work.”193 According to these statements, Martin wanted the photo-panels to foster a more intimate and tolerant viewing environment – traits which defined the relaxed, accepting atmosphere of the Fillmore galleries and apartments where the artists in “The Individual and his World” (and their curator) usually exhibited.194 In effect, he intended the photographs to cultivate or, at least, to approximate subcultural conditions of reception in the public sphere – to create the sense of experiencing this art the way its art world audience did. Martin’s personal knowledge of the Fillmore community, in sum, contributed both to his perception of the works as presenting a challenge to public signification and to his solution to this “problem.” On some level, the exhibition concept expressed his Virgilian identity and the conflicts within the changing San Francisco art world that it embodied.

**The Private World of Abstract Art**

While Martin’s personal experiences of the San Francisco scene likely inspired “The Individual and his World,” he constructed the exhibition with ideas and rhetoric appropriated from popular discussions of abstract art. He borrowed heavily from these discourses even though he never identified the exhibited works as abstractions. The exhibition’s foundational concept – that the works presented a challenge to public communication because they reflected their makers’ “extreme” individualism – was a common contemporary assessment of abstract art. This formulation cemented with Abstract Expressionism’s gradual rise to national and international prominence over the course of the 1950s as popular publications (such as *Life*) and blockbuster exhibitions (“The New American Painting,” for example) justified the difficulty of abstract painting when marketing it to mass audiences. The notion that photography could

---

192 “Traveling Exhibitions for 1959-60,” 112.
193 Fred Martin, letter to Paul A. Dufour, Assistant Professor of the Department of Fine Arts, Louisiana State University, April 10, 1960, AB file, SFAI Archives.
194 The 6 Gallery’s closing notice – written by the collective’s secretary, Beverly Pabst, in December 1957 – described this accepting atmosphere: “It has offered all of us the space and freedom to experiment not usually offered by other galleries or museums. As such the gallery has always been open to resounding defeats as well as moments of excitement and inspiration. Both kinds of experience were valuable for the gallery, or for that matter to any individual or groups of individuals vitally concerned with creative activity and human growth” (quoted in *The Beat Generation Galleries and Beyond* (Davis, CA: John Natsoulas Gallery, 1996), 93).
compensate for the obscurity of abstract art was also ubiquitous when Martin conceived “The Individual and his World.” Like the illustrated weeklies and documentary photo-exhibitions (notably, Edward Steichen’s *Family of Man*) that dominated mid-century American visual culture, the idea that photographs could illuminate the obscurity of abstraction evidenced a tremendous period faith in photography as a communication and social-engineering tool.\(^{195}\) This relation between media was intimately tied to postwar debates about the individual’s relation to society.

*LIFE* magazine’s postwar coverage of the visual arts exemplified the overt politicization of abstract art and the abstract artist. From the late 1940s through the early 1960s, *LIFE* heralded its signature brand of photojournalism as the antidote to modern art’s obscurity. Incorporating nonobjective works into photo-essays, *LIFE*’s editors claimed, made the former’s enigmatic language instantly legible. The magazine framed its mediation between avant-garde and public as a not only cultural but also political task. It championed abstract works as emblems of individual freedom, an American ideal threatened by the specter of Soviet socialism. “This tremendous, individualistic struggle, which makes modern art so difficult for the layman,” explained *LIFE*’s editors in 1948, “is really one of the great assets of our civilization. For it is at bottom the struggle for freedom.”\(^{196}\) But, *LIFE* cautioned, the artist’s flaunted independence – manifested in the avant-garde’s elitist “cult of unintelligibility” – also imperiled the Free World.\(^{197}\) “The chasm between artists and democratic society could conceivably prove as frustrating to cultural progress as the old class war,” warned a 1960 editorial. “Yet, it can be bridged.”\(^{198}\) When modern art’s individualism strayed into “alienation and obscurity,” when its autonomy courted solipsism and hermeticism, *LIFE* would undertake the crucial task of reintegrating it with the mainstream.\(^{199}\) In sum, the publication staged its nationalist, neo-liberal conception of the relation between self and society as a relation between abstract painting and photography.

Furthermore, the association that “The Individual and his World” posited between artwork, individual identity, and the domestic interior had already surfaced in contemporary discussions of abstract art. This conceptual affiliation depended on a long history. The domestic interior emerged as a “topos of subjective interiority” in mid-nineteenth-century Europe.\(^{200}\) Conceived as a safe haven from “the alienation and disjunctions of the modern city,” the bourgeois home – not unlike the artwork – was viewed as a privileged site and “vehicle for self-definition,” expression, and authentic experience.\(^{201}\) This discourse gained renewed relevance during the postwar housing boom in the United States. To many commentators, the new suburban developments converted the home from a sanctuary for the self into a factory for

---

\(^{195}\) Blake Stimson investigated many such facets of the postwar perception of photography in *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

\(^{196}\) “A *LIFE* Roundtable on Modern Art: Fifteen Distinguished Critics and Connoisseurs Undertake to Clarify the Strange Art of Today,” *LIFE*, October 11, 1948, 56-79. This famous roundtable laid out the approach that *LIFE* would take towards modern art through the 1950s. Its title announced the magazine’s intermediary role.

\(^{197}\) “In a Second Revolution the New Role for Culture,” *LIFE*, December 26, 1960, 45.

\(^{198}\) Ibid. Notably, Martin also used the metaphor of “bridging” to describe photography’s mediating function in his exhibition.

\(^{199}\) Ibid.


\(^{201}\) Ibid., 10 and 2.
conformity. With their monotonous design and lack of privacy, tract houses – pundits argued – routinized experience and reduced self-expression to consumerism. They crushed the individuality of their inhabitants, turning them into “other-directed” zombies. As one critic concluded, “Mass produced dwellings . . . produce mass dwellers.” By this logic, Levittown’s identical Cape Cods were both the cause of and a metonym for their occupants’ homogeneity. Like abstract art, then, domestic architecture served as a forum for discussing the nature, and even the possibility, of individual identity in postwar America.

At times, these parallel discourses intersected. “The Individual and his World” marked one such junction. “The Private World of Abstract Art,” an article published in 1957 by the art critic Emily Genauer, marked another. The latter appeared in a special New Year’s edition of House and Garden magazine devoted to privacy. “A look into 1957,” the cover declares, “Privacy is the key to a year of grace” (fig. 11). The words emblazon caned French doors which crack open to reveal a stately interior beyond. The partial view is both inviting – it solicits readers to enter the magazine’s pages and the year ahead – and protective. (The photograph addresses the conundrum: How does one depict privacy?) The issue featured architectural designs and decorating schemes determined to restore privacy to the modern American home with its open floor plan, glass walls, and “fishbowl” picture windows. According to Genauer, contemporary American art suffered from the opposite dilemma: it was too private. “Why,” she asked, “does the artist paint so private a world that we cannot follow him into it?”

Her argument unfolded around the well-worn metaphorical equation – which “The Individual and his World” literalized – between artwork and interior. Describing both as spaces for the “projection of personality,” she likened the viewer’s experience of a painting to entering a room. Representational paintings, she argued, offered easy passage across the threshold of the artist’s “private world.” Viewing them amounted to a “conversation, a constant exchange of reported and repeated facts,” with the artist. The work, in short, provided a conduit for belonging; it acquainted the viewer with the artist-Other and his worldview. However, Genauer asserted, abstract painting obstructed this social aesthetic experience. She compared walking through a contemporary art gallery to moving down a “corridor past a succession of closed doors.”

The doors may be gaily decorated. Perhaps they’re just slightly ajar, so the passer-by overhears fragments of conversation that yet remain unintelligible. Possibly the doors are of opaque glass, and he gets blurred glimpses of shadowy figures moving on the other side. But the pictures, which should be open doors to experience, remain barriers. The experience is a frustrating one, and too many persons leave the scene in anger.

For a particularly vehement articulation of this banal view see John Keats, The Crack in the Picture Window (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

David Riesman coined the term “other-directed” in his classic sociological text The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950). It designated individuals who lacked autonomy – who looked to those around them for their values and how to behave.

Keats, 124.


Ibid., 20.

Ibid.

Ibid., 98.

Ibid., 20.
According to Genauer, these impenetrable works implied that the artist was “a withdrawn, lonely man plumbing his neuroses” in a studio “hermetically sealed against the color and vigor of the crowd, of everyday life, of the larger world.” She advised thwarted viewers to relax and attend to the “quietness” “on the other side of the door.” If the painting was worthwhile, she assured, this extra-social communion would breed not only a satisfying “rapport” with the artist but a feeling of “transcendence.” According to Genauer, this latter sensation stemmed from the viewer’s recognition of the deepest, most universal aspects of human experience in the work. Like Martin’s press release, Genauer’s article ends on a Romantic note by reaffirming the value of abstract painting’s difficulty: “And so on the other side of the door which is a not quite understood picture, can be dreams, memories, passions, filling a quiet room with color and movement, even with the sweet sounds of those unheard melodies which Keats wrote are sweeter than those heard.”

Martin clearly appropriated many of these tropes around abstract art to build “The Individual and his World.” How, specifically, did the exhibition mobilize these familiar figures (i.e., the solipsistic artist, the private work and its photographic supplement, and the domestic interior as symbol for the artist’s personality and paintings)? How did it take up (replicate, modify, etc.) contemporary frameworks and practices for representing the artist as individual and his significance to postwar society? The remaining sections home in on the exhibition’s specific contribution to this discursive field by analyzing it in light of two comparable examples.

“17 Contemporary American Painters” in the Same House

The exhibition’s affinity to current discussions of abstract art is unsurprising given that Martin based his design for “The Individual and his World” on a prominent recent show of abstract paintings. A review of the Art Bank show, published in the Oakland Tribune on November 29, 1959, alluded to this precedent. “Photographs accompanied the ‘Younger American Painters’ [sic] exhibit at the Brussels Fair,” noted the Tribune’s Art Editor, Miriam Dungan Cross, “but, according to Martin, the artists all appeared to live in the same house.” “17 Contemporary American Painters,” as the exhibition was officially titled, was shown in the U.S. Pavilion of the Brussels World’s Fair (or Brussels’ Expo) from April 17 to October 19, 1958. Like “The Individual and his World,” the installation of paintings incorporated a photo-montaged panel of each artist, all of which apparently have been lost (fig. 12). George Staempfli, the New York gallerist appointed to direct the exhibition, commissioned Hans Namuth to photograph the artists. Namuth, a German émigré based in New York City, had

210 Ibid.
211 Ibid., 98.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid. Genauer is referencing Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” of 1819.
215 In addition to “17 Contemporary American Painters,” the Pavilion’s visual arts program included “Indian Art in the United States” (organized by Rene d’Harmoncourt of the Museum of Primitive Art, New York), “American Folk Art” (organized by Mrs. John A Pope of the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service), and “Contemporary American Sculpture” (selected by the Office of the Commissioner General in cooperation with the architect of the U.S. Pavilion, Edward D. Stone).
216 Staempfli’s official title was Assistant Chairman of the Fine Arts Section. While Namuth shot and developed the photographs, Staempfli selected which prints to display and arranged them on the panels. If the panels are extant, I have yet to locate them. They appear to have passed into the proprietorship of the American Federation of the Arts at the Expo’s end. Namuth also showed prints from the series at the Stable Gallery in 1958. I base my analysis here on individual photographs that Namuth shot for the assignment but which were probably not displayed on the
gained recognition earlier in the decade for his portraits of abstract-expressionist artists. Martin likely learned about the exhibition prior to its opening from either Grace Morley, director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, who helped jury the show, or Sonia Gechtoff, DeFeo’s next-door neighbor and Martin’s colleague at CSFA, who was one of the chosen artists. Given his connection to CSFA and the Fillmore community, Martin almost certainly knew of the photo-shoots Namuth conducted at Gechtoff’s life-drawing class and apartment in January 1958. Martin may even have witnessed them firsthand.

Because of the Brussels Expo, the installation design that Martin adapted for “The Individual and his World” had very explicit political implications. Despite its message of world unity, the Fair (the first after World War II) was a Cold-War battleground. Its Belgian hosts – perhaps recognizing that competition would prevail over the event’s pretense of international cooperation less than a year after Sputnik’s launch – set the stage for a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union by assigning the sparring powers large adjoining plots. The fairground mapped the riven geopolitical landscape as the blocky, neo-classical Soviet Pavilion – a monument to totalitarian techné – faced off against the airy rotunda of the American Pavilion – a symbol of democratic transparency and freedom (fig. 13).

Given his connection to CSFA and the Fillmore community, Martin almost certainly knew of the photo-shoots Namuth conducted at Gechtoff’s life-drawing class and apartment in January 1958. Martin may even have witnessed them firsthand.

Because of the Brussels Expo, the installation design that Martin adapted for “The Individual and his World” had very explicit political implications. Despite its message of world unity, the Fair (the first after World War II) was a Cold-War battleground. Its Belgian hosts – perhaps recognizing that competition would prevail over the event’s pretense of international cooperation less than a year after Sputnik’s launch – set the stage for a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union by assigning the sparring powers large adjoining plots. The fairground mapped the riven geopolitical landscape as the blocky, neo-classical Soviet Pavilion – a monument to totalitarian techné – faced off against the airy rotunda of the American Pavilion – a symbol of democratic transparency and freedom (fig. 13). Organizers of the U.S. Pavilion borrowed the term “soft sell” from Madison Avenue to characterize their program. The soft sell is a marketing strategy that fosters desire for products by associating them with pleasurable experiences and aspirational identities. Its method of subliminal persuasion contrasts with the direct, forceful pitch of the hard sell. The soft sell suited America’s consumer-oriented, hegemonic approach to Cold-War propaganda.
deemed appropriately subtle for the sale of freedom. This tactic manifested in the Pavilion’s inviting and entertaining atmosphere (leading the press to dub it the “pleasure dome”) which was designed to associate capitalism with a lifestyle of leisure and wellbeing.221

The American press also viewed the large, gestural abstractions featured in “17 Contemporary American Painters” as epitomizing the soft sell.222 Many reviewers characterized the aesthetic styles featured in the US and Soviet Pavilions as distillations of the countries’ polarized styles of propaganda and, by extension, styles of power. They associated abstraction’s open-ended, experiential mode of communication with the soft sell and the heavy-handed messages of the Soviets’ socialist-realist works (or, as one reporter dubbed them, “slogans in pictures or in bronze”) with the hard sell.223 Journalists also read the American paintings’ nonobjective subject matter as evidence of artistic freedom, especially in comparison to Russia’s content-laden, state-sponsored realism. By associating abstract painting with individual liberty and anti-totalitarianism, the US reception of “17 Contemporary American Painters” rehashed conceits from MoMA’s contemporary promotion of Abstract Expressionism as cultural propaganda in Europe, as manifested in “The New American Painting” and “Jackson Pollock.”224

Objections to the exhibition were equally formulaic. A chorus of critics and visitors vehemently questioned the paintings’ effectiveness as propaganda. They felt that the works, like the Pavilion as a whole, presented “too soft a sell.”225 In other words, they feared that expressing individualism through the language of abstraction came at an undermining cost – communication failure. A reviewer for Time magazine summarized this critique in an article subtitled “Soft Sell, Range and Controversy”: “They [the artworks] leave no doubt that in the U.S. an artist is free to pursue his personal vision and interpretation. The hope of the U.S. show is that this unique message of freedom will make its way through the bewilderment.”226 Given the exhibition’s high political stakes, the argument went, these opaque works were not only frustrating; they were dangerous. By “representing the wildest extremes of personal liberty,” the paintings supposedly conjured a fragmented America – a society unable to strike the proper balance between personal

222 Why the jury chose the artists they did is something of a mystery. Though the Archives of American Art contains some documents from their closed-door proceedings, no explanation for their selection of predominantly nonobjective works survives. Morley justified this choice after the exhibition opened, stating that abstractions appealed to the government’s target audience of young, sophisticated Europeans (Grace Morley, letter to Everett Elliott, July 25, 1958, AFA, AAA). Some criteria were made public, however. All the artists were under forty-five years of age. This criterion was set primarily as an excuse to leave out the heavyweights – such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko – who were included in the Fair’s international art exhibition. In addition, the committee was supposed to ensure the exhibiting artists’ geographical diversity, since each of the three jurors hailed from a different region of the country.
224 The three exhibitions were simultaneously on view in Europe at various moments during 1958. After The Brussels Expo, the paintings in “17 Contemporary American Painters” were displayed at the United States Information Service Library in London. At this time, “Jackson Pollock” was showing at the Whitechapel Gallery, and “The New American Painting” was scheduled to open at the Tate the following February (Margaret Cogswell, letter to Stefan Munsing, July 8, 1958, AFA, AAA).
freedom and the national good, private and public, individual and collective. This argument (like Life’s analysis of abstract art) equated the work’s separation from recognizable subject matter and, thus, from a comprehending viewer with the artist’s separation from society. By portraying Americans as atomized, decadent, and self-centered, abstract art, commentators warned, played into Soviet propaganda and catalyzed very real political consequences. A letter commenting on an article in The New York Times, “Abstract Art is Going to Europe to Represent American Culture,” demonstrated how nonobjective art was imagined to foment further factionalism and instability in the international community:

It [abstract painting] may well represent our culture, but not to our credit. Many people throughout the world have misgivings about this kind of art and the culture it represents. In fact, if world tensions and jitters continue, future man probably will be depicted accurately by a mess of blurs and splashes of color.

In this doom-laden account, abstract-expressionist art becomes representational as America’s soft-sell cultural strategy precipitates a nuclear holocaust.

The organizers of “17 Contemporary American Painters” included photographs in the exhibition to stave off predictable critiques like these. Staempfli hoped photo-displays would temper the paintings’ “individualism” both by creating a more comprehensive viewing experience and by depicting the artists as integral members of American society. He succinctly described the panels’ intended function in a memorandum to Thurston Davies, Executive director of the U.S. Pavilion, on December 6, 1957. “Photographs of the artists,” he wrote, “would go a long way towards humanizing this otherwise rather abstract exhibit.” Staempfli’s statement conflated multiple connotations of the words “humanize” and “abstract.” It collapsed each term’s reference to an aesthetic language with a quality of comprehension. Thus “abstract” signified both the nonobjective character of the exhibition’s paintings and their abstruseness, while “humanize” conveyed both the photographs’ representational nature and their capacity to make the works easier to relate to. The photographs tied the works down, giving them an origin in an individual, a ‘self.’ “Humanize” also alluded to the Fair’s slogan, “A World View – A New Humanism,” which expressed the goal of fostering global unity through the recognition of mutual humanity.

Staempfli also tailored his specifications for Namuth’s photographs to ensure that the images would suture the tears abstract art was seen to rend in America’s social fabric. He charged Namuth with capturing the artist “in the context [of] his daily surroundings” and in “relationship to . . . his family and friends” – an assignment clearly calculated to counter the

---

227 Quoted from Haddow, 126.
228 See, for example, Norman Kent, “Why Did They,” American Artist, May 1958, 3.
230 I do not mean to suggest that Staempfli added photographs in response to these critiques, but rather that he hoped they would prevent the stir that a show of predominantly abstract paintings was likely to cause.
231 Staempfli, U.S. government memorandum to Dr. Thurston J. Davies, December 6, 1957, RG 59, Records Relating to the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, 1956-1959, Box 1, folder “Fine Arts,” National Archives, College Park, MD.
232 Slogan quoted in Haddow, 94.
image of the isolated artist. Staempfli explained to Davies, “with good photographic material that each of [these young artists] is human and has normal community ties, families and all that.” Namuth’s documentation of each artist’s connectedness “to the people and things with which he lives” was ultimately supposed to illuminate his belonging to the national community. Staempfli wanted the photographs to contextualize each artist within “the ‘American way of life,’” the nation’s common cultural habits and the ideological principles thought to underlie them. “Thanks to your effort,” wrote the curator in a congratulatory letter to Namuth, “we were able to illuminate with great poignancy the American scene and the civic climate in which our artists live and work.” By representing the artist as an active participant in the national public sphere, Namuth’s photo-panels were supposed to counteract the threat that the paintings would be seen as representing an atomized America.

***

Martin clearly patterned the “Individual and his World” on “17 Contemporary American Painters.” He adopted the latter’s exhibition design to achieve similar ends – using photo-panels to make the exhibited works more approachable. Burchard’s panels, however, differed markedly from Namuth’s in terms of both the artistic identity and viewing experiences they crafted. These divergences suggest that Martin liberally customized the Brussels model to suit goals specific to his San Francisco context.

In keeping with his assignment, Namuth depicted the artist as a thoroughly social animal. His seemingly candid shots frequently captured the primarily male artists interacting with their wives and children (fig. 14) as well as neighbors (fig. 15), students, etc. When combined on the panels, these images mapped each artist’s network of private and public relationships. Furthermore, his photographs often implicated the viewer within the normalized social scenes they represented. One typical shot situates the viewer as Ellsworth Kelly’s dinner guest (fig. 16). The fragmentary composition and low angle of view create the illusion that the viewer is “in” the scene – sitting across the table from the artist in his Coenties Slip loft. The scattering of empty glasses, dishes, and flatware signal that the meal is over. Kelly – mouth open, elbows leaning on the table top – appears to be speaking, intently, with an interlocutor just beyond the frame’s left edge. In the background, a woman and small child (Delphine Seyrig and Duncan Youngerman) play in the commodious interior of the converted industrial space. Namuth used selective focus to make Kelly the nexus of the interactions staged, both explicitly and implicitly, across the photograph’s lateral composition. The artist – a gay man – appears to perform both gender- and hetero-normative roles within this web of relations. He engages in discussion, while the woman engages in childcare. By cropping out Jack Youngerman – Seyrig’s husband, Duncan’s father, and, most likely, Kelly’s invisible conversationalist – the photograph inserts Kelly into the heterosexual family unit. Like many of Namuth’s photographs of Kelly, this one represents him within the Coenties Slip community even as it normalizes the spaces and relations of that bohemian collective through strategic framing.

233 George W. Staempfli, letter to Hans Namuth, January 17, 1958, NA; and Staempfli, letter to Namuth, October 23, 1958, NA.
234 Staempfli, memo to Davies, December 6, 1957.
236 Ibid.
238 Both Kelly and Youngerman participated in “Sixteen Americans.”
239 Namuth’s photograph of Kelly sitting in his studio with Agnes Martin and a dog produces a similar effect.
Burchard’s panels, in direct contrast, represented each artist alone. Proof sheets and discarded prints from his shoot with Hedrick reveal that Burchard systematically edited out photographs that showed the artist interacting with others. These rejects depict the spaces of Hedrick’s art practice and private life as fundamentally social. A contact sheet showing Hedrick welding an unknown sculpture in the communal courtyard of 2322 Fillmore Street records several intruders besides Burchard (fig. 17). The film captures the presence of Hedrick’s next-door neighbor, the painter Joan Brown. She smiles and glances askance while absent-mindedly pulling her long hair – apparently bashful in front of the lens. In the following frame, Hedrick playfully recodes her nervous gesture as he attempts to tug her down into the shot to share his spotlight. The series captures the sociability of “having one’s picture taken.” It betrays the particular interactions and behaviors (e.g., playful posturing, fidgeting, embarrassed laughter, etc.) prompted by the artificial act of presenting oneself to the lens. Burchard also captured a second photographer, most likely a neighbor, leaning precariously out a second-story window to document the scene with an old-fashioned Rolleiflex camera. This phantom – whose actions both paralleled and momentarily disrupted Burchard’s – evidences the community’s engagement in self-representation.

Burchard also figured Hedrick’s relationship with DeFeo. He snapped a series of the pair sitting by their living-room fireplace (fig. 18). The hearthside setting and the artists’ intimate yet hierarchical pose stage a traditional, cozy domesticity that identifies them as husband and wife. These clichés are at odds with the room’s bohemian décor and the couple’s casual dress which signals a more unconventional lifestyle, especially when they are compared to the bourgeois trappings represented in Namuth’s photograph of Ad Reinhardt’s family (fig. 14). Burchard also represented Hedrick’s studio as a space shared by the couple. Though his photographs show Hedrick painting alone, many prominently feature The Rose (fig. 19). In one shot, DeFeo’s painting fills over half the frame, dominating the visual field (fig. 20). Tight cropping compresses the space, pushing the graphically-bold work near the picture plane. Hedrick’s body looks as if it is wedged between the two canvases. The composition not only evidences the proximity in which Hedrick and DeFeo painted; it suggests that this physical intimacy generated a relationship of influence (one, interestingly, which reverses the traditional positions of male dominance and female subordination staged in the living-room shots). These discarded photographs are similar to Namuth’s, then, because they situate the artist and his practice within a network of personal relationships. They also share the lively, candid quality of the Brussels series.240

In the process of assembling the panels, however, Burchard banished all indicators of the artists’ sociality.241 He prohibited depictions of interaction. On Hedrick’s board, for example, a banjo replaces DeFeo as the artist’s fireside companion (fig. 7). The remaining photographs in the montage – both empty interior scenes – simply confirm his isolation. Only obscure clues remain of Hedrick and DeFeo’s relationship and shared space after Burchard’s eviscerating editing. The right photograph on Hedrick’s panel and the lower left photograph on DeFeo’s panel (fig. 4) represent the same space – the entrance to the couple’s apartment from the

240 Namuth’s clearly posed portrait of Reinhardt’s family seems to contradict this characterization of the Brussels photographs. However, the shot captures the artist’s young daughter as she fidgets – her right arm and leg buckling with boredom, her face pressed into a screwy smile – an action which breaks her parents’ composure and restores spontaneity to the shot’s conventionalized codification of family identity. This “imperfect” detail also revives a sense of the photographic act’s social dimension. No doubt Burchard would have considered it an outtake.
241 I suspect, but have not been able to confirm, that Martin gave Burchard full control over the panels’ assembly.
building’s central stairwell. (The heterogeneous paintings lining the staircase stand in for the couple’s now invisible neighbors.) The shot on Hedrick’s panel was taken from the apartment doorway where DeFeo stands in her panel’s corresponding shot. The steep camera angle of Hedrick’s photograph simulates DeFeo’s upward glance, replicating her perspective for the viewer. This peculiar dialogue between the montages feels both significant and intentionally oblique. It reads like a Freudian slip in the panels’ syntax – as a necessary but elliptical eruption of DeFeo and Hedrick’s repressed relationship into the space of public display.

Burchard’s culling process also suppressed signs of spontaneity. Though a few photographs depict artists smiling (figs. 5 and 6) or caught in conversation (fig. 8), most maximize the composure of both sitter and image. Artists pose in carefully constructed shots that utterly lack the ease and candor of Namuth’s snapshot-like pictures. Even representations of artists relaxing depict their gestures as oddly wooden and their bodies as unnaturally still. For example, the shot of Hedrick playing his banjo by the fire, whether the scene was posed or not, conveys the effect of having been staged for the camera (fig. 7). His cocked head and distant gaze conform a bit too closely to the cliché of the musician lost in reverie. The incongruity between the artist’s summery attire and the roaring fire further belies the photograph’s authenticity. Burchard also favored shots in which the artists wear impassive faces – selecting, for example, a photograph of DeFeo staring blankly sideways rather than one of her smiling into the lens (fig. 22). When Burchard’s sitters do look directly at the viewer, their stony gazes are more enigmatic than inviting. In direct contrast to the Brussels panels, then, the San Francisco montages snuff out almost all signs of expressive engagement with the viewer.

Namuth not only situated the artists socially; he placed each within a series of nested physical environments – home, neighborhood, city – that ended, conceptually, with the nation, a context represented by the Pavilion housing the installation. The depicted locations were usually identified in the brief biographical sketches affixed to the panels, which Namuth wrote. The shot of Kelly and his neighbors relaxing on the roof of their building, for example, locates the artist’s “world” (both his community and dwelling) within the larger context of metropolitan New York (fig. 15). Skyscrapers “at the foot of Manhattan” loom up from the roof at staggered angles as if in a constructivist painting.242 The chaotic collection of buildings both mirrors and dwarfs the bodies of the artists casually arrayed – sitting, squatting, and standing – across the sloping tarpaper skin. A photograph of William Baziotes also adamantly contextualizes the artist within a specific milieu (fig. 21). Namuth places the artist in the street. A row of boys crowds close to the lens, eliding the foreground and flattening the cityscape of large apartment blocks and wide streets beyond. Baziotes, clearly amused by the situation, is nearly lost in the fray: his head and shoulders barely peak above the boys’ caps, and one of their arms threatens to occlude him altogether. Only Namuth’s selective focus and an arrow-like tree differentiate the artist within the photograph’s jostling visual field. The shot, in sum, takes pains to perceptually integrate the white, middle-aged artist with his “Harlem” neighborhood, an environment which the photograph codes as urban, working class, African American, and vibrantly youthful.243

Burchard’s photographs, by contrast, only depict the private spaces of each artist’s home and its immediate environs (e.g., backyard, driveway, garage, etc.) – a territory that generally includes a studio. They engage context and locality on a micro scale. Unlike Namuth’s

242 Hans Namuth, “Notes on Painters,” AFA, AAA. Christopher Rand edited these notes prior to their display on the panels. Quoted passages from Genauer’s review of the exhibition (cited below) suggest that the archived copy is a pre-edited version of the document.

243 Ibid.
expansive, wide-angle views, Burchard’s close-cropped shots create a sense of delimited, private space. Even his outdoor scenes feel like interiors. Rather than situate each artist’s personal surroundings within broader geographic contexts, his montages restrict the viewer’s gaze to its confines, so that she encounters the artist’s “world” unmoored from the larger world “out there.” While the text and images of Namuth’s montages work together to locate the spaces of the artists’ daily lives, Burchard’s montages dislocate them. They treat each artist’s home as a hermetic habitat – segregated and isolated like the artists themselves.

While Namuth’s panels immerse the artist in the world, Burchard’s panels immerse the viewer in the artist’s world. They appropriate montage structures from film to simulate the experience of entering into and moving through the artists’ homes. The diagonal juxtaposition of two small prints on Dunham’s panel, for example, imitates a cinematic zoom (fig. 5). Moving from the long shot in the upper left to the mid-range shot in the lower right constructs the perceptual illusion of physically moving up the driveway to the doorway of Dunham’s garage studio. The pairing generates a sense of spatial constancy and temporal continuity absent from Namuth’s montages, which document discrete places and moments. Anderson’s panel similarly dramatizes the viewer’s entrance into the artist’s studio (fig. 1). The open doorway (an instance of Burchard’s frequent, almost fixated, representation of liminal spaces) in the upper left-hand photograph invites the viewer into the shadowed interior beyond. The horizontal image to the right answers this enticement by situating the viewer amid the studio’s throng of sculptures. Read together, the shots generate a sense of bodily immersion by simulating both spatial traversal and the subjective experience of vision as the viewer’s eyes “adjust” to the studio’s dim backlighting in the second shot. Rather than follow the artist out into the world, the viewer approaches the artist’s secluded chambers. Like the ritual procession into a shrine, these dramas of liminality signal the artist’s apartness by staging the privacy and mystery of his space even as they breech it. By contriving the artist’s physical isolation, Burchard’s photo-panels substantiate the image of the “lonely artist” – the identity on which Martin staked his exhibition and which its works supposedly intimated. In this respect, “The Individual and his World” inverted its Brussels model, which integrated the artist with American society to counter the extreme individualism projected by its abstract paintings.

Namuth’s panels also compensated for the viewer’s potential estrangement by fostering his or her identification with the artist. As we have seen, his photographs tend to normalize the artist. They represent relationships and places particular to each artist’s life but do so in ways that familiarize them – that fit the specific details of individual biography into typical, non-threatening molds. Thus Kelly’s communal and queer Coenties Slip circle resembles a heterosexual family; and Baziotes’ a friendly neighborhood boarding Harlem where “the color line does not exist.” In these photographs difference provides superficial interest that gives way easily to a sense of commonality. Staempfli expressed this imperative in his directions to Namuth: “What we would like to get across to our large foreign audiences is that the artist is not only a creator but also and simply a human being” and thus, the statement implies, like the viewer. Namuth’s seemingly “informal” shots of artists smiling and socializing in everyday situations foster a congenial atmosphere that inclines viewers to sympathize with those

244 Other cinematic tropes Burchard used to create the illusion of embodied space include establishing shot, shot/reverse shot, and eye-line match.
245 Namuth, “Notes on Painters.”
depicted. They provide, in short, a human-interest angle into the show’s abstract paintings. Similar to Life’s “soft” coverage of threatening events, Namuth’s photographs put a relatable “face” to the sublime and potentially disturbing works.

A photograph of Richard Diebenkorn, a Bay Area painter only slightly older than the Fillmore group, walking his dog pushes Namuth’s portrayal of the artist as Everyman to an almost comical extreme (fig. 23). This shot is typical in that many of Namuth’s photographs document artists performing routine activities (e.g., shopping at the grocery store, riding bicycles, reading their children bedtime stories, watching television, etc.) Diebenkorn’s unassuming, petty-bourgeois style – complete with close-cropped hair and corduroy jacket – complement the mundanity of his chore. The setting, too, appears commonplace. Suburban homes nestle under a veil of fog on hills in the distance. These details place the scene in Northern California, yet Namuth’s shot downplays the landscape’s specificity and drama (qualities famously emblematized in Diebenkorn’s paintings of the early 1960s). The artist’s pointing gesture, the curving sidewalk, and the guardrails lining the road place him on a summit. Namuth, however, cropped out the vista that Diebenkorn indicates, making the ridge resemble a cul-de-sac (i.e., the suburban ideal promoted in the U.S. Pavilion) more than “a peak in Darien” (i.e., the Romantic ideal of sublime solitude). The panel text reinforces the image’s demystification of the artist: “Their house is not unlike any other on Hillcrest Road. The children (Gretchen will be 13 in May, Christopher is 10) are like the neighbor’s kids and want to be like other children, be accepted.” Namuth, in sum, represented the artist as someone the viewer could imagine meeting on the street and striking up a casual conversation with (a scenario the photograph stages) – someone, that is, anonymous in his ordinariness.

The photojournalistic style of both Namuth’s images and Staempfli’s arrangement of them was vital to conveying the artist’s approachability. After all, the photographs needed to be effortlessly decipherable for their contents to appear familiar. Due to their documentary aesthetic, Namuth’s photographs appear uncoded. They read as direct windows into “real events” from the artists’ lives. This fiction of transparency was essential to each panel’s ability to acquaint viewers with the artist in a seemingly natural way – through his or her biography and (simulated) social interactions. Genauer’s review of “17 Contemporary American Painters” for the New York Herald Tribune indicates that the panels’ text also contributed to the images’ explicitness. She excerpts a passage from Bernard Perlin’s panel: “He keeps to himself and goes three times a week to the gymnasium for exercise” (picture here of Perlin in shorts working with dumb-bells). Her addition of the phrase “picture here” to her description of the photograph conjures a spatial – specifically, caption-like – relationship between the two media that did not exist on the panels, where the text was presented as a solid block rather than fragmented and paired with corresponding images. Her reading suggests, however, that Staempfli’s montages resembled Life photo-essays enough to prompt a similar viewing experience – one in which photographs appeared to illustrate (i.e., to serve as informational and rhetorical equivalents of) prose. In this example, Namuth’s notes anchor the polysemous

247 Emily Genauer, “U.S. Art Show at Brussels Fair Baffles or Amuses Europeans,” New York Tribune, June 22, 1958, page unknown, AFA, AAA. To my knowledge, Genauer’s was the only review of “17 Contemporary American Painters” to mention Namuth’s photographs. In addition to the generally negative response to the show, the critical invisibility of the panels suggests that they failed to perform as Staempfli intended.
248 The shot was taken near Diebenkorn’s home in Berkeley, California.
249 Namuth, “Notes on Painters.”
250 Genauer, “U.S. Art Show.”
snapshot of Perlin in the gym to a specific, stable meaning – the artist’s tri-weekly workout.251
Staempfli, in fact, unsuccessfully petitioned *Time*, *Look*, and *Life* to publish Namuth’s “picture stories” as magazine spreads.252 This fact suggests that the curator intentionally modeled the exhibition’s photo-panels on illustrated weeklies and their clear communication style.

While the Brussels panels attempted to overcome otherness, Burchard’s preserve difference. Both what and how they represent frustrates identification with the artist. The upper right photograph in Anderson’s montage exhibits the many ways the San Francisco shots estrange the viewer (fig. 1). It depicts the artist sitting on a children’s swing. Unlike the routine situations Namuth represented, this scene is deliberately odd and unnatural. Anderson’s blatant inactivity makes the subject matter even more cryptic. Though seated on a swing, he does not engage in the act of swinging. The precipitous angle of view severely foreshortens Anderson’s crouched form so that it appears to crumple under the weight of gravity. Stillness from the sculptures in the studio shot below appears to leach across the photographs’ overlapping seams and invade the artist’s person. The juxtaposition of his motionless body with a device for dynamism makes his inertia pointed and strange. In other words, the shot’s unfulfilled allusion to movement constitutes a provocative negation of action. Anderson’s resolute immobility is typical of the artists in Burchard’s photographs, who could not be more different from Namuth’s bustling creators. His images speak a language of display rather than action. They attend to the things cluttering the artists’ private spaces rather than to the activities filling their schedules. Botherton’s montage, for example, enumerates the contents of his studio (fig. 2). The photographs cast a fetishistic gaze over his foreign art implements (Sumi brushes, inkstone and stick) but leave artistic labor flagrantly unpictured. The artist colludes with this petrifying representation. Rather than use his brush as a painting tool, he cradles it in both hands like a museum piece. His stiff posture and white dress assimilate him into the collection of Asian statuary on the shelf behind him.

The photographs’ rhetoric of display places the viewer at a remove from the artists’ lives. Burchard’s images force the viewer to infer the artist’s character, actions, and relationships from his or her personal object world. In other words, they prompt a hermeneutic of decoding—a mode of meaning production which starkly lacks the immediacy and explicitness characteristic of Namuth’s panels. Burchard’s stilled tableaus ask to be read as crime scenes for the viewer-turned-detective to scour in search of clues to the artist’s biography, art practice, and personality.253 Reading this way, the swing and highchair on Anderson’s panel evidence his young family, and the mix of light and dark sculptures in his studio suggest that he worked with plaster maquettes. The artists’ frozen bodies elicit the same mode of attention as the objects around them. The viewer engages Anderson’s eerily-arrested silhouette, for example, not as a

251 Viewed alone, the photograph does not necessarily suggest habit. The image could also be read as evidence of a deeper investment in fitness by the artist than the caption allows (i.e., the Perlin identifies as a bodybuilder). This analysis is informed by Roland Barthes famous structural analysis of the press photograph in “The Photographic Message,” *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15-31.
252 George W. Staempfli, letter to Harris K. Prior, director of The American Federation of Arts, December 4, 1957, AFA, AAA; and Staempfli, memo to Davies, December 6, 1958.
conversant but as an object to be deciphered, like the tools and toys strewn on the ground about him. He appears to have absorbed not only the inanimateness of things but also their material muteness. Some shots represent the artists’ possessions as emblems of identity, rather than simply indexes of action and interaction. For example, the close-up of Dunham’s teapot perched atop her radiator imbues the everyday object with poetic resonance (fig. 5). The teapot appears to carry meaning beyond biographic fact – to signify more fundamental and intangible aspects of the artist’s character (such as, her hospitality, whimsy, gentility, or femininity) than her habit of drinking tea or her bohemian lifestyle. However, the photograph, untethered from text, leaves these metaphorical connotations open-ended. Like all of Burchard’s photographs, it fosters a more active, speculative, and subjective viewing experience than Namuth’s unequivocal shots. Rather than check the projective power of images, Burchard’s oblique and enigmatic panels revel in it.

Furthermore, the stylized quality of his photographs augments their ambiguity. In contrast to Namuth’s seemingly candid images, many of Burchard’s shots are too obviously staged to read as documents. His use of avant-garde photographic techniques, such as extreme angles of view and severe contrast, thwart transparency. The viewer’s reading of what the photograph represents, in other words, trips over how it is represented. Contrary to Namuth’s journalistic aesthetic – which strove for maximal legibility and eased viewing – Burchard’s subjective style both destabilizes meaning, by eliciting a more open, poetic manner of interpretation, and frustrates viewing by obfuscating content. His formal choices for Anderson’s swing shot, for example, profoundly contribute to the odd scene’s estranging effect. The photograph violates practically every convention for representing people. It situates the viewer behind and above the artist; an inky shadow blots out what remains of his profile. By obliterating the customary cues for reading images of people (i.e., expression, gesture, and physiognomy), the photograph throws the viewer off balance and invites a more aesthetic, exploratory, and self-conscious mode of engagement. Burchard’s stylistic decisions, in short, make the artist strange and meaning elusive. In other words, they achieve the inverse of Namuth’s normalized and packaged representations of artistic identity.

***

As the already-cited critiques of “17 Contemporary American Painters” indicated, the Brussels photo-panels failed to perform the mediating role Staempfli intended them to play. Indeed, the exhibition was one of the most contentious aspects of the U.S. Pavilion. Broadening the show to include representational paintings was one of the few suggestions made by George V. Allen, director of the United States Information Agency, whom President Eisenhower sent to investigate citizen complaints about the Pavilion. Genauer accounted for the installation’s ineffectuality in her unfavorable review. She began by deriding the panel notes and, by

---

254 Burchard’s panels also included boxes of text – specifically, the artists’ pithy, professional biographies copied from the Art Bank catalog – which were affixed to the blank white areas blocked out on each board. Unlike Namuth’s character sketches, the text did not directly relate to the photographs.

255 The controversy “17 Contemporary American Painters” kicked up in Brussels also became the focus when it was shown at the World House Galleries in New York to raise money for the Sheltering Arms Children’s Service. A press release for the showing pitched this slant: “Only U.S. Showing of Controversial American Art from Brussels World’s Fair / Few people who did not actually see the much-debated exhibition of American Painters and Sculptors at the Brussels Fair really know what all the shouting is about. Here is a chance to see for yourself. / Visitors Act As Art Jury – Vote on Exhibit / An added element of interest in this exhibition is that each visitor is invited to join a “Citizen’s Jury” and vote on these works as a group” (Press release for World House Galleries, undated, AFA, AAA.)
implication, the photographs that illustrated them as “Miss Subways type comments.” This reference to a New York City Subway poster campaign that featured headshots and brief descriptions of attractive female riders characterized the account of identity created by the photo-panels as packaged, superficial, and frivolous (i.e., feminine). The analogy also snubs Staempfli’s fine art installation by likening it to a popular advertising scheme. In other words, it asks: How could a strategy used to personify mass transit effectively personify abstract painting? “It’s completely in character with our exposition planning,” she continued, “that the same audience first assumed to be sophisticated enough to appreciate the most difficult abstractions should now be addressed on the kindergarten level.” In her view, the condescendingly-simplistic panels were inadequate because they were utterly incongruous with the works on display. Rather than translate the paintings’ “sophisticated” aesthetic language into a comprehensible idiom, the photographs, in her view, spoke past the works – their “kindergarten level” communication style overcompensating for abstraction’s difficulty. The two media failed to cohere in Genauer’s experience of the exhibition: the photographs’ biographic model of identity could not be grafted onto the paintings’ existential account of selfhood; the mundane sociability simulated by the photographs conflicted with the transcendent experience of individual interiority fostered by the paintings; the photographs’ cheery tone clashed with the paintings’ bravado. As a result, the artist as Everyman and the artist as Other passed without meeting.

Martin’s adaptation of Staempfli’s mixed-media installation corrected this defect by displaying photographs that spoke in an oblique register consonant with the works. Namuth’s photographs were meant to compensate for the alienating effect of abstract painting by providing the opposite experience. In Genauer’s *House and Garden* terminology, they were supposed to restore the “conversation” between artist and viewer that abstraction stifled. Staempfli hoped that explicit depictions of affable artist-Everymen would demolish the figurative wall between viewers and the artists’ “private worlds.” Burchard’s photographs, on the contrary, largely replicated the estranging effects Martin attributed to his show’s idiosyncratic works. They approximated the recalcitrance and distance – or, according to Genauer’s allegory, “quietness” and separation – characteristic of the “frustrating” experience of abstract art. They imaged the stereotypical “withdrawn, lonely” artist that this viewing experience was seen to imply. Even though the photo-panels immersed viewers in the artists’ homes (i.e., in their literal “private worlds”), they positioned viewers firmly “on the other side of the door” to the artists’ metaphorical “private worlds.” They preserved the mystique of the artist’s difference (even as they literally domesticated it) that Namuth’s photographs tenaciously dispelled. If Namuth’s pictures overcompensated for the artwork’s opacity, Burchard’s risked not compensating enough. Martin set the same broad goal for his photo-panels as Staempfli – to present the works as “intelligibly and sympathetically as possible.” By reinforcing the artist’s difference, however, Burchard’s photo-panels subverted the means by which the Brussels show attempted to achieve this end. They muddled the functional mechanism of Staempfli’s exhibition by replacing counterbalance between media with consonance. Next to their Brussels counterparts, the San

---

256 Genauer, “U.S. Art Show.”
257 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 20.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid., 98.
262 Martin, letter to Dufour, SFAI Archives.
Francisco panels seem more suited to further alienating viewers than to making the artists’ works more approachable and understandable.

By critiquing “17 Contemporary American Painters” to Cross, Martin announced that his exhibition’s significant divergence from its high-profile precursor was intentional. His comment that “all the artists appeared to live in the same house” mobilized the metaphorical association between private space and the private self to encapsulate the difference between the exhibitions. He derided the Brussels show for homogenizing its artists – for representing them as Levittown automatons living in identical prefabs. Martin’s disparaging remark likewise implied his embrace of the converse imperative – to distinguish the artists. By making the idiosyncratic contents of the artists’ interiors appear, Burchard’s photographs naturalize the notion of interiority. They represent the self rather than the citizen. Moreover, Martin’s metaphor tied this task to separating the artists spatially. That is, it linked individuation to isolation. The lengths Burchard went to create the illusion that Hedrick and DeFeo did not “live in the same house” testified to the exhibitions’ antitheses. Martin’s adoption of the Brussels exhibition’s design was, in a word, conflicted. On the one hand, he clearly found Staempfli’s solution to abstract painting’s “problem of the public” applicable to his own challenge of presenting works produced in the Fillmore circle to outside audiences. On the other hand, he wanted to construct an image of the artist as individual that preserved some degree of otherness. His derision for the Brussels exhibition signaled his investment in this account of artistic identity, though the nature of and reasons for his stake in it remain hazy. Ultimately, “17 Contemporary American Painters” was as much a foil for “The Individual and his World” as it was a model. Martin appropriated Staempfli’s idea of supplementing the exhibition’s recalcitrant works with photographs to facilitate viewing. However, the resulting representations of artistic identity and the style of engagement they elicited diverged from the Brussels prototype to the point of contradicting it.

A More Lonely Place: The Abstract-Expressionist Studio

At times, Namuth protested the aesthetic strictures imposed by the Brussels project. His creative conflicts with Staempfli are manifest in a letter criticizing the curator’s choice of photographs for the panels:

To give you an example: I am quite disappointed that in the case of Marca-Relli you are omitting the large photograph of his face; I value this picture very much; the same applies to the face of Bernard Perlin with his eyes closed which I think is an outstanding one in the entire group. Pictures like these reveal more about the man, in my opinion, than all the supermarkets in the United States.

263 Cross, “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed.”
264 Hans Namuth, letter to George Staempfli, March 11, 1958, AFA, AAA. Staempfli’s response is also telling: “This exhibition (your part in it) is not only an exhibition of beautiful photographs, per se, but is mainly a photographic documentation of something totally unphotographic; namely, the way each artist fits into or differs from his community. In other words, I have not chosen (in several cases) photographs which I considered superb from the artistic point of view, simply because I felt that the photographic excellence, though desired and needed and appreciated and important, was not the primary (deciding) qualification of one photograph against another. . . . I do hope you understand this consideration which may seem to lack sensitivity and appreciation of your best shots, but that is not the point. I am merely choosing, to the best of my knowledge, prints which will point up diversity, which tell a story and which cover as much ground as possible (letter to Namuth, March 18, 1958, AFA, AAA).
Namuth revealed his preference for intimate portraits over the documentary, situation-based shots Staempfli selected. However, his quarrel with the curator went beyond aesthetics. His comment about Perlin’s photograph indicates that he also took issue with the panels’ portrayal of artistic identity. For Namuth, the artist was an “inner-directed” rather than an “other-directed” individual.265 The locus of the artist’s identity – and thus the most worthy subject to capture on film – was his subjective interiority, not his participation in “the American way of life.” Thus, to Namuth, a close-up of an introspective Perlin communicated more about his character than “all the supermarkets in the United States.”

Namuth’s conflict with Staempfli betrayed his allegiance to the model of artistic identity, and the conventions for representing it photographically, that developed around Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s and 1950s. As Caroline A. Jones demonstrated in The Machine in the Studio, the abstract expressionists modeled themselves after Romanticism’s idea of the individual genius.266 Photographs of the solitary artist absorbed in contemplation within his cloistered studio pictorially codified this persona. Such images, Jones convincingly argued, served as public expressions of artistic autonomy and the privacy of abstract art. The Brussels exhibition – perhaps due to its pressing political stakes – subverted these tropes of representing abstract artists. Shaped by Staempfli’s objectives and curatorial choices, Namuth’s photographs made over the Romantic “lonely artist” into an Average Joe engaged in the world around him. However, as the above quote suggests, Namuth felt conflicted about abetting this metamorphosis. Staempfli’s photojournalistic presentation of Namuth’s photographs was calculated to muffle any doubts that registered in his images.

Namuth’s photographs for “17 Contemporary American Painters” also assumed a different role in the viewer’s experience of abstract artworks compared to his previous oeuvre. The photo-panels were supposed to compensate for the alienating paintings by staging the opposite experience – i.e., social belonging – between viewer and artist. Typical portraits of abstract expressionists, by contrast, figured the artist as a model for the viewer, rather than as someone with whom to identify. Secluded in his austere studio, the artist exemplified the transcendent, autonomous selfhood that the viewer ideally attained in front of the abstract expressionists’ sublime canvases. Such photographs fostered a “rapport,” rather than a relationship, between viewer and artist.267 That is, they drew an analogy between the subject positions of the artist in his studio and the viewer in the gallery that preserved the autonomy of each. Artist and viewer, in other words, remained on either side of Genauer’s proverbial “door.” The archetypal portrait of the abstract-expressionist artist supplemented his paintings by reinforcing – rather than by counterbalancing and, thus, contradicting – their account of the private self.

Burchard’s photographs of the artists in “The Individual and his World” clearly had more in common with conventional abstract-expressionist portraits than with Namuth’s Brussels series. His images mobilized the standard trope of the solitary artist whose location within a hermetic interior signifies artistic individualism. Similarities abound, for example, between Burchard’s photograph of Conner’s studio (fig. 3) and a portrait of Barnett Newman taken by Namuth in 1952 (fig. 24).268 Both represent the artist alone in his studio. In both shots, strong

265 Riesman.
268 I do not know when and under what circumstances Namuth’s photograph of Newman was first made public.
exterior light bleaches out the view through the windows, severing room from world, inside from out. Conner and Newman sit in self-enfolding positions – shoulders slouched and ankles crossed – staring straight ahead but away from the camera. Back-light abstracts each artist’s body into a seated silhouette, giving it an “othered” quality that – in addition to his withdrawn posture and averted gaze – signifies the remoteness of his subject position. As this example suggests, Burchard’s artist portraits were “of their time” (like Martin’s brazenly-Romantic conceit of the “lonely artist”) in both content and style. However, they also diverged from the New York model in significant respects. As a result, the San Francisco shots crafted a unique definition of the artist as individual – one that emphasized difference over autonomy. Significantly, Burchard’s modifications to this period paradigm also prevented his photographs from serving as models for beholding.

Though both photographs discussed above portray the studio as a hermetic cell, they convey very different experiences and conceptions of privacy. Newman’s studio appears cavernous in Namuth’s wide shot. The ceiling soars above the seated artist, while the floor’s empty expanse pushes Newman and his paintings to either side of the frame. Dramatic lighting compounds the sublime feeling created by scale. Blanching light appears to evaporate the floorboards as it dances over their polished surface, creating the illusion that Newman’s chair hovers in thin air. The artist’s otherness is otherworldly, and his distance is auras. The studio’s etherealizing air seems iminimal even to even the viewer’s embodiment. Namuth’s long shot creates a yawning distance between artist and viewer. The observer occupies a purely optical, “fly on the wall” perspective – a “non-presence” which leaves the hermetically-sealed chamber and Newman’s meditative isolation inviolate.269

Conner’s studio conspicuously lacks the lofty grandeur of Newman’s. Its scale seems more domestic than industrial. While Namuth’s wide-angle view creates a sense of expansion, Burchard’s close cropping and deep focus create a sense of constriction. The photograph’s frame – and the space it contains – appears to tighten around the centrally-seated artist. Privacy has a different feel here: it is stifling and oppressive. The shot also constructs a distinctive relationship between the beholder and depicted space. The snugly-cropped image simulates an intimate, corporealized view. Junk (i.e., raw materials for Conner’s assemblages) piled to the artist’s left spills through the photograph’s bottom edge or – in the spatial fiction the picture stages – “past” the viewer. In this way, the image enconces the observer in the same room as the artist – a position which contradicts the distant, disembodied view into Newman’s studio. Conner turns his back to the camera and raises his hood, misanthropic gestures which acknowledge the viewer’s presence but (unlike in the Brussels’ photographs) code it as a trespass. His otherness exudes an unsettling, rather than otherworldly, affect. Cramped and overflowing with debris, his studio looks more like a shut-in’s den than a holy hermit’s cell, as if his retreat into the self led to the verge of derangement instead of transcendence.270 By recognizing the viewer’s existence, Burchard’s photograph foregrounds the central paradox of the studio shot – that representing the artist’s “private world” violates its seclusion. The “fly on the wall” perspective of Namuth’s shot dodges this conundrum.

The other photographs on Conner’s panel foreground this paradox by staging a dialectic between access and exclusion. Both images depict the same space – the artist’s living room. The upper left shot places the viewer at the dimly-lit parlor entrance. An armrest juts into the

269 Jones characterizes the photographer’s position in such shots as “voyeuristic” (35).
270 The shot appropriates a hackneyed compositional trope from horror films: it positions the viewer as the hero poised at the height of suspense just before the killer turns to reveal his true identity.
view from the lower right corner. It acts as both a barrier – signaling the beholder's peripheral position – and an arrow – directing her to the rocking chair by the window. However, the right photograph revokes this invitation to enter the room. It "pushes" the viewer outside the apartment entirely as Conner displaces her in the rocker. The dark interior envelops him – its blackness melding with his hair and jacket. Foliage springs up from the windowsill that divides him from the viewer. Fat geranium leaves mimic Conner’s pale, round face and shroud his body. Along with the lace curtain and window frame (which hovers, guillotine-like, over the artist’s head), the vegetation forms a camouflage screen that blocks access into the room. This unlikely barricade of domestic decoration reads as a projection of Conner’s standoffish attitude. With blank expression and slouched posture, he appears to begrudge and shrink from the viewer’s presence. His sunglasses (like his raised hood in the studio shot) indicate a desire to reclaim his disturbed solitude.

In sum, Namuth described privacy as an inherent and invulnerable property of the studio, while Burchard portrayed it as a manufactured state. Newman’s unselfconscious absorption and his studio’s openness give his isolation a feeling of plenitude. His solitude seems given and secure, as it should in a room that appears to not simply bar but to transcend the outside world. Conner’s panel, by contrast, enacts the production of privacy. The artist’s aloneness has an active and relational character: it reads as withdrawal from the viewer’s prying gaze and an encroaching “beyond.” Since the studio was a metonym for the artist’s individualism, Burchard’s reconceptualization of privacy influenced his account of artistic subjectivity. The absolute and totalizing isolation of Newman’s self-sufficient studio equates individuality with autonomy. Conversely, Burchard’s montage defines individuality as difference by articulating Conner’s distinctiveness (i.e., the studio’s separateness) relationally. Conner’s isolation – unlike Newman’s – is also alienation. By defining the artist against the viewer, Burchard’s photographs prohibit the former from serving as the latter’s model.

In addition to liminality, Burchard’s photo-panels communicate the artist’s difference spatially by disorienting the viewer. In this way, the artist’s private realm remains foreign and mysterious even when the images admit the beholder into it. Typical depictions of the abstract-expressionist studio represent space as transparent, cohesive, and navigable. Even when the studio fragments into a series of partial views – as in Namuth’s famous ArtNews spread, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” from 1951 – sequential montage generates a thread of continuous action that stitches space (and the artist) into a coherent whole (fig. 25). Burchard’s montages, by contrast, offer few clues to orient the viewer. They portray the artist’s “private world” as a series of enclosed, often dark, spaces rather than a single, airy chamber – as labyrinths rather than lucid perspectival boxes. Burchard cropped many of his shots too closely to convey a sense of the layouts and dimensions of the rooms they depicted. The image of the stairwell on Hedrick’s panel is typical in this regard (fig. 7). The steep-angled, fragmentary view makes the space barely legible, let alone navigable. Denied a ground plane, the viewer must piece together the stairwell’s identity from architectural clues, such as a glimpse of banister or chandelier. The shot positions the viewer physically “in” the doorway by including a close-up glimpse of the doorjamb. However, the photograph embeds the viewer in the scene only to strand her there. Its frame severs the first flight of stairs, preventing the viewer from imaginatively advancing into the foyer. Like many of Burchard’s shots, it places exhibition-goers in the artist’s “private world” only to pull the rug out from under them.

The panels’ montage format promised to complete these truncated views by piecemeal. Instead of providing a secure footing for the viewer, however, Burchard’s juxtapositions further
disorient. Many willfully play with the represented architecture – coaxing the viewer to perceive, if only momentarily, spatial relationships not really “there.” On the left side of Hedrick’s panel, for example, Burchard sutured a window frame in the lower shot to a column in the upper shot to create the illusion of a single vertical expanse.\(^{271}\) At first, the space appears consistent (an illusion stabilized by the pair’s juxtaposition with the similarly tall and steep stairwell shot). The amalgam’s tenuous spatial logic soon disintegrates, however. Fused to the window frame, the canopy cannot project out as the upper photograph’s perspective indicates. Rather than shelter the artist, the canopy appears to recede, illogically, behind the fireplace wall. The double perspective created by this composite throws off the viewer’s bearings. Untrustworthy reconstructions like this one indicate that Burchard intentionally engineered the panels’ destabilizing effects – that he manufactured the artist’s turf to confuse and unsettle. They also indicate that he aimed to construct a subjective, non-factual account of each artist’s personal environment. He pieced together disjointed bits of the artists’ homes as if psychically processing them – as if illogically reconstructing the places in dreams or mistaken memories. Through Burchard’s montage, the viewer experiences the artist’s world like a sleepwalker falling in and out of consciousness.

***

Burchard’s photographs mobilize the perennial association between interior space and subjective interiority. Their depiction of the artist’s cluttered object-world and his affinity with it, however, asserts a unique relationship between private space and the private self – one that further estranges the viewer. The abstract-expressionist studio was a space of pure artistic agency – a capacious, vacant chamber where the artist’s mind and body had free reign. “To enter Pollock’s studio,” wrote Robert Goodnough in the text for “Pollock Paints a Picture,” “is to enter another world, a place where the intensity of the artist’s mind and feelings are given full play.”\(^ {272}\) To ensure autonomy, the studio had to be not only a protective shell but also an empty stage for the artist’s subjectivity. It was, as Jones observed, both segregated from and antithetical to the domestic sphere in particular.\(^ {273}\) The studio’s expansive sparseness inverted the home’s decorative clutter and its connotations with habit, bodily maintenance, familial relations, and the feminine (i.e., reproduction). The studio was, in other words, a haven from all that was base and oppressive in everyday life – a place for spontaneous action, heroic individualism, and masculine virility (i.e., production). *The Artist’s World in Pictures*, a 1961 book documenting the New York art scene by Fred McDarrah and Gloria Schoffel McDarrah, articulated the loft’s ideological charge:

> In the United States our imaginations have been stretched, probably from the beginning, by the spaciousness of the wilderness, the height of the mountains, the depth of the western canyons. Then came the tallest building, the longest bridge. Now there are the artists, drawn to our greatest city by its excitement and virility, needing immense studios in which to realize the mural-size pictures and room-size sculptures that express their far-stretched American vision. Such painting, such sculpture cannot be created within the confines of the garrets of older days; artists working in New York today need real space.\(^ {274}\)

---

\(^ {271}\) Conner’s and Grant’s panels include other examples of this spatial play.


\(^ {273}\) Jones, 36-41.

This passage described the sublime studio as both a container and stand-in for the artist’s outsized and distinctly-American selfhood.

Namuth represented Pollock’s barn-studio (which, significantly, was detached from the house he shared with his wife, the painter Lee Krasner) as an arena of unhindered action, much as he represented Newman’s loft as a site of undisturbed contemplation (fig. 25). Each image in “Pollock Paints a Picture” captures the scene of production from a distinct perspective. Namuth’s lens careens across the canvas, swooping from a precipitous angle to a worm’s-eye view. Even though the sequence presents only fragmentary views of the room, the camera’s arcing movements convey its vastness. The mobile camerawork mimics Pollock’s dynamic gestures, amplifying their fluidity. Artist and camera glide effortlessly through the ample studio – its space acquiescing completely to their synchronized movements. The objects in Pollock’s studio are also fully subservient to artistic action. Besides the artist and his works, only painting tools occupy the room. Pushed to the periphery of both Pollock’s workspace and Namuth’s photographic frame, open paint cans – utensils protruding from their gaping mouths – stand at the ready along the wall. With their scattered arrangement and dripping sides, the row of cans mirrors the painting in front of it, indicating that everything in the orbit of Pollock’s process succumbs to its bodily rhythms and messy materiality.

In such representations, the studio’s lack of décor and its submission to the artist figure it as a “non-place.” Purged of things, each studio bares few distinguishing markers. They look essentially the same – interchangeable both with one another and with the gallery’s “white cube.” The McDarrahs, in fact, listed homogeneity as a chief characteristic of the loft studio:

If, five thousand years from now, the mortal remains of a New York artist were mounted in a museum of natural history, the placard below the figure would surely read: Homo sapiens, artifex americanus, habitat: ‘cold water loft.’ Today, at least, generalizations about the artist and his work are difficult at best, and predictably inaccurate. But to describe one cold water loft is to describe them all. The conformity in this one respect is astonishing.  

Notably, the authors assured readers that the uniformity of New York’s studios posed no threat to the artists’ individuality. Though counterintuitive, the studio’s standardized image actually supported the abstract-expressionist account of artistic individualism. For the studio had to resemble pure space, rather than a specific location, to evidence and emblematize artistic autonomy. Namuth and other photographers represented the studio as a rudimentary perspectival construction – an empty, abstracted, and interchangeable unit of space – to show that it exerted no influence on creativity. Like the modernist gallery, the abstract-expressionist studio was conceived as an “anti-context” – an utterly neutral platform for the beholder/creator’s unadulterated encounter with the artwork.

Representations of the monastic loft-studio affirmed the autonomy of artist and work (as well as their identity with each other). However, the studio was also extraneous to this message. Many photographs from the period conveyed the hermetic unity of artist and work by cropping out space. A photograph of Franz Kline standing in front of his painting Crow Dancer (1958) – published in Life less than a week before “The Individual and his World” debuted – typifies this trope (fig. 26). The square image truncates the edges of Kline’s body and the monumental

---

275 Ibid., 13.
276 The photograph illustrated Dorothy Sieberling, “The Varied Art of Four Pioneers,” Life, November 16, 1959, 74-85. Life, in particular, used this technique. Its famous feature “Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the US?” from August 8, 1949 sports a particularly dramatic example of this severe “outline” cropping.
canvas – flattening artist and work against the picture plane. Kline’s attire echoes the painting’s monochromatic color scheme, and his leftward lean both mirrors and extends the diagonal slash of black on the canvas’s right. Shadows cast by the unseen skylight above further their visual suture. By evacuating space, the shot expresses the idea that the individualistic artist and his original work supplant context – that they are worlds unto themselves. Like representations of the austere, solitary studio, then, such photographs illustrated artistic autonomy, but they did so by omitting the studio. They suggest that the place of production was a superfluous link in the metaphorical chain between the hermetic artist and his hermetic work.

The private object-worlds Burchard constructed bear little resemblance to New York’s stark lofts. His panels freely mix photographs of the artists’ living areas and work spaces, creating the sense that they are contiguous and, at times, even indistinguishable. The vertical juxtaposition of Hedrick’s canopied workbench with his hearth, for example, posits a fluid exchange – a migration of objects and aesthetic influences – between the spaces (fig. 7). It stages, that is, a promiscuousness between the spaces of art and the domestic that the segregated abstract-expressionist studio strictly forbade. Even though they isolate the artist, Burchard’s interiors embody the bohemian ideal of “art into life” more than Romantic asceticism. They brim with things. Paintings and sculptures overflow crowded studios and spill onto living-room walls and mantels where they mingle with knickknacks, houseplants, and lace curtains. Contrary to the neutral, self-effacing loft, these profuse and decorative object-worlds exude expression. The artist’s environments appear personalized – made rather than given. Each panel features a unique constellation of objects, giving each habitat a distinctive character. Unlike typifying representations of the abstract-expressionist studio, that is, Burchard’s photo-panels differentiate. The scattered materials and open-frame shelves of Locks’ work yard, for example, convey a rustic ambiance that could not be further from the erudite atmosphere of Botherton’s studio, with its whitewashed walls and orderly collection of Asian artifacts (figs. 8 and 2). In “The Individual and his World” each artist occupied a specific place, rather than abstract space. Their surroundings manifested individuality as difference, rather than as autonomy.

Instead of functioning as passive containers for creative action (whether mental or physical), Burchard’s interiors exert agency. In Conner’s studio, for example, objects submit the artist to their will instead of acquiescing to his (fig. 3). Matter is not confined to the periphery as it is in Pollock’s studio. Stuff spills in from the photograph’s edges, crowding the artist’s chair. Instead of obeying an externally-imposed logic of use, the chaotic piles of materials appear to behave according to their own laws of accumulation and entropy as they encroach, swarm-like, around the artist. The photograph stages Conner’s ontological capitulation to this object invasion. His hooded silhouette fuses with the broken cane chair on which he sits, spawning an uncanny hybrid that shares the surrounding debris’ muteness and dilapidation. Burchard depicted Conner’s studio as an influencing context – a characterization which contradicted period conceptions of the studio as a chaste vessel for subjective plenitude. These different characterizations of the studio reflect the disparity between the processes of expressionist painting and assemblage.

277 Harold Rosenberg articulated this trope in his famous ArtNews essay “The American Action Painters” from 1952: “The lone artist did not want the world to be different, he wanted his canvas to be a world” (quoted from Jones, 23).
278 At times, as on Conner’s panel, the relationship Burchard constructs between living space and studio is more dialectical.
279 Burchard recapitulated the creative production of these spaces when he imaginatively reconstructed them on the panels.
280 These contrasts parallel the artists’ disparate appearances and aesthetics.
On Burchard’s photo-panels, artist and work are integral elements of the décor rather than sovereign entities. Simpson’s panel depicts his paintings lining the walls of his apartment (fig. 9). Unlike the sheets of unstretched canvas tacked up in Pollock’s barn or the row of paintings propped against Newman’s studio wall, Simpson’s works are integrated into his home’s interior decoration. They serve as dramatic backdrops to curio arrangements, and their repeated horizontal markings even echo the striped area rug. The environment absorbs Simpson as well. Rather than engage the works around him, he surrenders to the room’s sensuous effects. His almost-indecently languid body melts into the doorframe, and raking light tattoos his bare chest with the window frame’s cross pattern. The photographs’ noir lighting recalls *Life*’s portrait of Kline (fig. 26). In both, dramatic shadows project the artist’s brooding masculinity and help assert his identity with his art.281 Instead of collapsing the artist onto his canvas, however, Burchard spaced this visual analogy across two photographs. The upper right image on Simpson’s panel captures the same light effects as the image below it, but a painting replaces the artist’s body as the screen onto which the windows cast their gridded motif. Significantly, the lower left image depicts the windows themselves, creating a diagonal shot-reverse-shot construction which simulates Simpson’s spatial immersion for the viewer. The repeated shadows on the right side of the montage liken artist and work, then, but – unlike in *Life*’s decontextualizing shot – their association is indirect; it occurs in space and is orchestrated through environmental effects. In other words, Burchard described the artist’s personal surroundings as foundational to (instead of expendable from) the equation between his personality and his paintings.

In sum, “The Individual and his World” constructed an ecological account of artistic identity and creativity. Contrary to representations of the abstract-expressionist studio, Burchard’s photo-panels bind identity to location and wed authorship to environment. By eliminating action and focusing on décor, his photographs represent artist, work, and context as an interrelated whole that blurs agency. Does the mellow, bohemian ambiance of Simpson’s apartment reflect his personality or does the place foster his “cool” attitude? Which is the source of the paintings’ aesthetic? Notably, the exhibition’s press release fostered a similar ambiguity. “The photographs,” Martin wrote, “help to make clear the natural and logical development of the art from the artist’s personal environment and his reaction to it.”282 In this account of creation, place chiefly determines the work. The artist plays a subsidiary role: he contributes to the creative process by inflecting his surroundings. Indeed, the passive construction of Martin’s statement expropriates agency from the artist. Like Burchard’s photographs, his description of the works’ “natural and logical development” suppresses labor. The small photograph in the lower-left corner of Locks’ panel jokingly literalizes this naturalization of artistic creation by depicting an assemblage “growing” like a fantastical mushroom out of the artist’s lawn (fig. 8).

***

Martin clearly drew on contemporary representations of the lonely abstract-expressionist artist in his solitary studio to conceive “The Individual and his World.” Burchard’s photographs certainly resembled this Romantic New York archetype more than they did Namuth’s images for “17 Contemporary American Painters.” However, by both characterizing privacy as relational and localizing artist and work, the San Francisco exhibition stressed difference over autonomy as

---


the defining feature of the artist’s individuality. This description of artistic identity prevented the represented artist from serving as a model for the viewer. Instead, Burchard’s photo-panels affected the viewer’s experience of the exhibition’s works in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the photographs revealed foreign object-worlds where in the bizarre pieces “made sense” – where they blended in (in terms of tone, aesthetic, organization, and/or materials) instead of sticking out. These represented contexts helped illuminate the works (and the artist’s “personality”) by elaborating their difference – by reiterating their specific and peculiar characteristics as décor. On the other hand, the panels signaled the works’ inaccessibility. Unlike images of the neutral New York loft, the ideal viewing contexts that Burchard depicted were not interchangeable with the exhibition space. The sites where the works could be fully experienced remained remote. In this way, the photo-panels confirmed the viewer’s distance from the works and the artist even as they partially bridged it.

Like abstract-expressionist studio shots, Burchard’s photographs of San Francisco artists at home confirmed the personal nature of their art. However, the consequences of the works’ privacy on viewing and, in turn, belonging appeared very different in his images. Photographs like Namuth’s portrait of Newman asserted the artist’s autonomy, but they also promised viewers the experience of subjective plenitude modeled by the artist. Such representations attributed to abstract painting an ability to foster a utopian collectivity – a “rapport,” in Genauer’s words, between viewer and artist based on the recognition of mutual humanity. Since this humanist belonging proceeded from self-fulfillment, it preserved individual autonomy. Like the Brussels Expo, then, photographs of the abstract-expressionist studio mobilized the idea of a universal humanity to address contemporary anxieties about the relation of self and society. Burchard’s photographs smacked of Romantic individualism, but they lacked the humanist overtones of their New York counterparts. His pictures both confirmed and mitigated the artist’s otherness and the work’s inscrutability, but they did not figure the possibility of transcending either. Thus, “The Individual and his World” conveyed a tension between public and private, viewer and artist that representations of the abstract-expressionist studio artfully eradicated.

**The Shock of the Studio**

At the beginning of this chapter, I connected Martin’s design of “The Individual and his World” to his duties as Art Bank administrator by characterizing the photo-panels as studio tours simulated for remote audiences. After analyzing the panels, this seemingly superficial analogy appears more telling. Burchard’s montages give viewers access to the artists’ private “worlds,” but that access is conspicuously managed, as it would be on a tour. The views they provide are staged, partial, and, at times, deliberately misleading – a careful dance between contact and withholding. Though they admit the viewer, that is, Burchard’s reconstructed interiors position her as an outsider. The context of acquaintance they offer was highly aware, even wary, of the viewer’s presence. The photo-panels function like tours, in short, because they admit to a public staging of the private – making the viewer hyper-conscious of her distinction from the artist.

This characteristic of Burchard’s photographs distinguishes them fundamentally from the other depictions of artists discussed in this chapter. Though very different from each other, both the Brussels and New York images represent the artist’s “private world” in ways that alleviate potential friction with the viewing public. Namuth’s normalizing pictures for “17 Contemporary American Painters” portray the artist’s domain as, essentially, public territory. Many acknowledge the viewer’s presence, but do so in a congenial way that – contrary to the

---

estranging effects of Burchard’s “self-conscious” images – fosters her identification with the artist. By representing the studio as a hermetic space interchangeable with the gallery, photographs of solitary abstract expressionists encouraged viewers to imaginatively occupy the artists’ sovereign “shoes.” Both sets of images made the viewer feel as though she belonged (either socially or existentially) in the artist’s “world.” In this way, each acted as an antidote to abstract painting’s “problem of the public.” They bridged the frustrating – and potentially dangerous – “gap” between artist and viewer, private and public, and self and society supposedly conjured by opaque “personal” paintings.284 Martin proclaimed that Burchard’s photo-panels supplemented the works in “The Individual and his World” according to this period paradigm. However, by positioning the viewer as an outsider, the panels in large part reinforced the divisions that Martin seemingly intended them to close.

It is tempting to see this contradiction as a manifestation of Martin and the Art Bank’s conflicted allegiances and agendas within the changing San Francisco art world. After all, the Art Bank also possessed conflicting means and ends since it exported native products to preserve the local scene. Martin’s exhibition design exacerbated the paradox inherent in the organization’s mission between circulation and locality by exporting the local context – in the form of Burchard’s photo-panels – with the works. On the one hand, the photographs opened the private spaces of the Fillmore underground to public audiences and, thus, promised to provide secret knowledge for unlocking the hermetic works. On the other hand, they distanced viewers by asserting the works’ attachment to re-presented but remote places. Burchard’s shots played up the tension – which always exists in representation and is especially palpable in photography – between accessibility and inaccessibility, presence and loss.285 The installation’s conflicting effects coincided with imperatives reflective of Martin’s dual roles in the San Francisco art world – with, that is, his official duty to publicize and his likely desire, as a Fillmore artist, to preserve the intimate environment of production to which he was accustomed.

***

While the factors that led to the exhibition’s singular emphasis on difference in its portrayal of artistic individualism remain vague, Cross’s review in the Oakland Tribune clarifies the risks of representing San Francisco artists this way in the late 1950s. “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed,” declared the headline of her critique, written for the exhibition’s kick-off showing in the CSFA’s Art Association Gallery.286 By referring to the works as “shocking,” the title crystallized Cross’s vitriolic assessment: that the installation bluntly failed to meet Martin’s stated objective of bridging “the gap between the usual conception of art and the most distant points of personal involvement in art.”287 She sneered, “The gap is wide. The bridge shaky.”288 Moreover, Cross described this failure as intentional. She called the exhibition “deliberately shocking [emphasis added]” and portrayed Martin as a sly provocateur whose avowed conciliatory goal was, in fact, a disingenuous cover for his true sensationalistic intentions.289 “With a smile as enigmatic as Mona Lisa’s,” she wrote, “Martin said the show has attracted wide

———

284 “Traveling Exhibitions for 1959-60,” 112.
285 The panels, in other words, buffered works produced in the shelter of the Fillmore circle against two violent, but opposite, eventualities of public viewing: they protected the works from being rejected outright by ignorant viewers, and they prevented the pieces from dissolving into pure exhibition value.
286 Cross, “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed.”
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid.
As the headline indicates, Cross framed the exhibition’s provocative stance as an example of beat rebellion, headless of the fact that visual artists in the Fillmore did not identify themselves as “Beats.” She even coined the moniker “Beatism” to label the show’s works. According to Cross, the neologism (a humorous iteration of the derisive “Beatnik”) signified both the works’ avant-garde, especially Dadaist, lineage and their kinship to the beat subculture. In fact, she described the Beats as inheritors of Dada’s adolescent spirit of dissent – of its “irreverent, cynical,” and self-indulgent imperative to shock for shock’s sake. Though Cross stopped just short of categorizing the exhibiting artists as Beats (hence the headline’s scare quotes), she represented the opacity of their works as a manifestation of that identity’s peevishly defiant attitude.

Cross identified the works in “The Individual and his World” with the Beats to discount them as art. Tribune readers would have been exceedingly familiar with the unflattering portrait of the Beats that Cross mobilized to characterize Martin’s show. 1959 marked the peak of media attention to beat communities in Greenwich Village, Venice Beach, and North Beach. Articles such as Paul O’Neil’s “The Only Rebellion Around” – which hit newstands in Life a day after Cross’s review was published – dismissed the Beats as incompetent dissidents and ersatz bohemians. The Beat was a “repellent,” but ultimately pathetic, figure who critiqued “American plenty” through his offensive (yet easily marketed) style and “exhibitionistic” diatribes, epitomized by spoken-word poetry. Accounts such as O’Neil’s deflated the challenge beat subculture posed to postwar society by portraying its rebellion as the superficial theatrics of immature and neurotic ingrates. “Who ever heard,” O’Neil asked Life’s readers, “of rebels so pitiful, so passive, so full of childish rages and nasty, masochistic cries?” Cross classified the works in “The Individual and his World” as another manifestation of the Beats’ “pitiful” rebellion, as no different from their confusing argot or distinctive costume. Her extensive description of Conner’s assemblages – which she deemed “the ‘beatest’ of the new Dada” – conflated their aesthetic qualities with the telltale signs of subcultural style. She emphasized the works’ degraded materials, disorganized composition, and lewd subject matter – all stereotypical markers of the Beat, whose slovenly and perverse physical appearance and “crash pad” declared his rejection of mainstream materialist values and sexual mores. By reducing the works to iterations of the Beats’ affectedly grungy lifestyle, Cross encouraged readers to transfer their derision for the subculture to the exhibition.

---

290 Ibid.
291 However, their circle did intersect with that of the North Beach poets in figures such as Michael McClure and at cultural/social events, such as the 1955 poetry reading at the 6 Gallery where Allen Ginsberg famously debuted Howl.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid. Connecting the Beats to the Dadaists was relatively common in this period probably due, in part, to the contemporary currency of Neo-Dada.
294 Interestingly, Robert Coates also marshaled beat identity to characterize the works in “Sixteen Americans” (“The ‘Beat’ Beat in Art,” The New Yorker, January 2, 1960, 61). Rather than use “beat” as a slight, however, he appropriated it in good faith to identify and flesh out a new aesthetic tendency.
296 Ibid., 115. O’Neil expressed this judgment with the following lines: “Talk – endless talk – forms the warp and woof of Beat existence. Talk and the kind of exhibitionism that almost always moves the average man to uncertainty and embarrassment are the Beat’s weapons against the world. Mostly he is incapable of anything else” (130).
297 Ibid., 130.
While she did not openly identify Burchard’s photo-panels as catalysts for her perception of the works as Beat, the subtext of her critique implicated the photographs in the exhibition’s confusion of aesthetic and subcultural style. The article’s layout practically screamed this association (fig. 28). An uncropped version of Burchard’s shot of DeFeo in front of The Jewel lay directly next to the headline, conveying the impression that the image illustrated its bold text – that it depicted a display of “shocking ‘beat’ art.” DeFeo’s presence lent clarity and credence to the headline’s characterization of the works as “beat” – an adjective not usually used in relation to art. While far from a formulaic portrait of the “beatnik chick,” Burchard’s representation of DeFeo sported enough signifiers of beat identity (e.g., cigarette, sandals, sultry attitude, etc.) for viewers unthinkingly to accept the attribution. Like all images, Burchard’s were open to manipulation and misreading. Although his depictions of each artist were unique, complex, and elusive, this example shows that they could be perceived as agents of the very stereotypes they were supposed to counter. His portrayal of the artists’ works as integral components of their personal environments opened the door to such readings. For they could easily be misread as reducing art to an expression of lifestyle, the conflation Cross implied with the label “Beatism.”

Her branding of the show as “Beatist” also deflated Martin’s representation of the artists as individuals. The Beats were seen not only as specious rebels but also as false individualists – as hypocrites conforming to a prescribed script of “otherness.” “While bawling of individuality,” O’Neil sniped, “scores of them mimic each other as solemnly as preschool tots in play period.” The spoofing photo-spread that prefaced his article illustrated this judgment (fig. 27). It humorously applied the representational conventions of decorating magazines to the Beat pad. This treatment was congruous because, in the popular imagination, the Beat household embodied the opposite of the conventional and commodified domesticity or “gracious living” promoted in House and Garden (and the U.S. Pavilion). Life’s photograph pictured the pad’s signature traits – i.e., abject unkemptness, “artsy” accessories (bongo drums, jazz records, typewriter), and outdated or improvised amenities (coal stove, crates moonlighting as furniture) – which figured it as a bohemian site given over to self-expression, to the discomfort, and even peril, of its inhabitants.

However, by staging the pad in a studio, complete with attractive models, and including numbered captions that snidely inventoried “all the essentials of...”

---

298 In fact, Cross went out of her way to dissuade readers from this blatant conclusion, writing: “Photographs of the handsome, clean-shaven young Bruce Conner in his tidy studio hardly prepared us for the ‘beatest’ of the new Dada.” She disconnected Burchard’s photographs of Conner from his works by characterizing the depicted artist as “square” (i.e., “clean-shaven” and “tidy”) and his art as “beat.” Of course, this binary still implicated the photographs in the comingling of aesthetic and subcultural style. This willful reading also required Cross to cherry pick details about Conner’s appearance while ignoring others (i.e., his sunglasses, hood, and standoffish demeanor). She even misrepresented the panel’s contents – conflating the artist’s orderly parlor with his studio, which was anything but.


300 O’Neil, 126.

301 As a bastion of egotistical self-expression and chaotic freedom, the beat household was represented as particularly perilous to the family. The Life photograph captured this sentiment by depicting a “Beat baby, who has gone to sleep on the floor after playing with beer cans.” For another example, see the representation of Artie Richer Venice home in “Squaresville U.S.A. vs. Beatsville,” Life, September 21, 1959, 32-33.
uncomfortable living,” the magazine represented these elements as the components of a codified and imitable style – a bohemian chic – rather than as signs of genuine individual expression. Cross essentially treated the works in “The Individual and his World” as Life treated the Beat home. She portrayed them as expressions of “Beatism” – a prescribed style calculated to convey the illusion of individual expression – rather than as manifestations of the artists’ genuinely idiosyncratic personalities, as Martin claimed. In other words, she accused Martin of opportunistically packaging the artists into a reductive, yet scintillating, mold of difference. Her reading shows how – when viewed in light of the national obsession with beat subculture – the distancing effect of Burchard’s photo-panels could be seen as pandering to the public’s thirst for spectacularized difference, rather than as resisting publicity. The “tours” the montages staged of the artists’ homes could be viewed as equivalent to the excursions bus companies were currently offering through North Beach. Her critique, that is, demonstrates how easily contemporary viewers could have misinterpreted the exhibition’s representation of difference. Primed by popular discourse to think about identity in polarizing terms (i.e., square versus beat, American versus Soviet, self versus other), viewers could have easily mistaken Martin’s attempt to individuate the artists – to provide a nuanced account of individual difference – for an attempt to subsume them under a generalized conception of otherness.

In sum, Cross’s review reveals the risks Martin ran in applying the installation design of “17 Contemporary American Painters” to artists from the San Francisco underground, and in using that design, counter-intuitively, to emphasize their distinction from the viewer. The clear bias of Cross’s article – the willfulness of her agenda to belittle the exhibition – makes her assessment of Martin’s intentions suspect. Her Martin is a guileful promoter deviously harnessing the popular Beat stereotype to sell his exhibition. This figure clashes with the Martin I describe in this chapter, who hoped to counter the kind of reactionary, homogenizing, and reductive readings sure to follow from any perception of the works as “Beat” or, more generally, as threateningly foreign. The true Martin probably lay somewhere between these two characterizations and is, at any rate, impossible to recover. Clearly, though, the artists and the exhibition organizers would have been keenly aware of the need to contend with the beat image when crafting their public personas.

“The Individual and his World” is the closest thing we have to a public group exhibition of Fillmore artists from the period of the community’s existence. This chapter has reviewed the exhibition’s form, production, and reception to explore the challenges involved in representing works produced within the Fillmore circle’s tight circumference to the public. It was the last of two chapters in which I examined exhibitions to provide a long-shot view of the Fillmore community within the broader context of postwar America. These chapters provide an establishing frame for the following section’s focused look at the community’s intimate art practices. They are intended to correct the kinds of myopia brought on by close looking. One of the most important findings to take away, at this transition into the “private” section, is the idea that the private is always a public construction. “Sixteen Americans” and “The Individual and his World” demonstrate that the Fillmore circle was forged in dynamic relation to the public

---

302 O’Neil, 114.
303 Performing a comparative analysis between Burchard’s photo-panels and popular representations of the Beats would establish a better understanding of the show’s relationship to beat stereotypes. Unfortunately, I do not have room to pursue this task here.
sphere – that it was not, as some scholars have claimed, a utopian retreat from the world.\textsuperscript{304} Caught up in the developing San Francisco art world, Fillmore artists and those around them navigated – if, at times, ambivalently and unsuccessfully – new pressures and opportunities to show to wider audiences. They contended with the public’s expectations of them and drew on existing cultural constructs to frame their art.

These borrowed frames inevitably produced a distorted image of artist and work. Following the Romantic conceit of “the lonely artist,” Martin and Burchard rubbed out all traces of the Fillmore community from their representations of the artists in “The Individual and his World.” Notably, DeFeo reasserted these excised relationships in a series of photomontages made from Burchard’s prints.\textsuperscript{305} She modified the photograph used in Cross’s review, for example, by affixing a cutout of Hedrick’s head to her own body (fig. 28). The replacement of her wary face with Hedrick’s beaming expression recodes her enigmatic pose as coy flirtation, made humorous by the montage’s confusion of genders. Like Hedrick’s faux memo to Martin, the collage (which she sent to Miller and was no doubt intended for private consumption only) inverted the serious tone of its appropriated source. By making this montage, DeFeo reclaimed her image from the public domain and reasserted the importance of playfulness and relationality to her identity and art process. The collage suggests a mode of belonging distinct from both the normalizing identification of Namuth’s Brussels series and the transcendent universalism of the abstract-expressionist portrait. The following chapters turn to works like this to examine the collaborative aspects of the Fillmore circle’s creative practice – aspects which, as both “Sixteen Americans” and “The Individual and his World” indicate, fell outside contemporary frameworks for understanding cultural production.

\textsuperscript{305} I have located two examples from this series. Both involve Burchard’s photographs of Hedrick, and both engage in with gender play.
Figure 1
Photo-panel of Jeremy Anderson for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 2
Photo-panel of Joe Botherton for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 3
Photo-panel of Bruce Conner for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 4
Photo-panel of Jay DeFeo for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 5
Photo-panel of Helen Dunham for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 6
Photo-panel of Art Grant for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 7
Photo-panel of Wally Hedrick for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 8
Photo-panel of Seymour Locks for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
**Figure 9**
Photo-panel of David Simpson for “The Individual and his World”
Jerry Burchard
1959
24 x 20 inches
Digital reproduction courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Art in the Bank

The San Francisco Art Bank pays dividends to West Coast artists. It not only collects and deposes the artist's works, it shows them to nationwide audiences and catalogues them for posterity and prospective purchasers.

Located at the California School of Fine Arts, the bank was established in 1958 with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

To become a depositor and accumulate interest, the artist must be a member of the San Francisco Art Association and a professional who has exhibited his work in at least three nationally recognized shows.

Since it was founded, the bank has gathered data on 250 West Coast artists and sent their works on road show tours across the nation. More than 400 works of painters, sculptors and print-makers are kept at the bank gallery and are displayed beneath a mural by Diego Rivera. Rivera would approve of the exhibits. The majority of them are abstracts, which, a bank official pointed out, are a good investment these days.

Figure 10

Fred Martin papers, 1949-1975, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1129
Figure 11
Cover of *House and Garden*, January 1957
Figure 12
Installation photographs of “17 Contemporary American Painters” in the United States Pavilion at the Brussels World’s Fair
1958
Photograph No. 581010-15 and 581010-16, Records Relating to the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, 1956-1959, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, MD
Figure 13
Photograph of the “Soviet and U.S. Pavilions at Brussels Fair” reproduced in “All’s Fair,” *Time*, April 28, 1958, 29
Figure 14
Ad Reinhardt and family at home
Hans Namuth
1958
Photograph
Figure 15
Delphine Seyrig, Robert Indiana, Duncan Youngerman, Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, and Agnes Martin at Coenties Slip
Hans Namuth
1958
Photograph
Figure 16
Ellsworth Kelly with Delphine Seyrig and Duncan Youngerman in Kelly’s Coenties Slip studio
Hans Namuth
1958
Photograph
Figure 17
Contact sheet of Wally Hedrick and Joan Brown in the courtyard of 2322 Fillmore Street
Jerry Burchard
1959
8 x 11 inches
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: The Dorothy C. Miller Papers, I.15.k
Figure 18
Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick in their Fillmore Street apartment
Jerry Burchard
1959
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 19

Figure 20
Wally Hedrick painting at 2322 Fillmore Street with *The Rose* in the background
Jerry Burchard
1959
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 21
William Baziotes with neighborhood children in Harlem, New York City
Hans Namuth
1958
Photograph
Figure 22
Two portraits of Jay DeFeo
Jerry Burchard
1959
Digital reproductions courtesy of Jerry Burchard
Figure 23
Richard Diebenkorn with his dog in Berkeley, California
Hans Namuth
1958
Photograph
Figure 24
Barnett Newman, New York City
Hans Namuth
1951
Photograph
Figure 25
Photographs by Hans Namuth
Figure 26
Photograph of Franz Kline standing in front of *Crow Dancer*, 1958
Published in “The Art of Four Varied Pioneers,” *Life* (November 16, 1959): 79
http://books.google.com
Figure 27
http://books.google.com
Figure 28
Miriam Dungan Cross, “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed,” The Oakland Tribune, November 29, 1959, 4C
Figure 29
Photomontage from prints by Jerry Burchard
Jay DeFeo
1959
8 x 11 inches
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY: The Dorothy C. Miller Papers, I.15.k
Chapter 3
Artist’s Model / Model Artist:
Wallace Berman’s photographs of Jay DeFeo

Wally Berman’s Trickster Photographs

On October 19th 1959, DeFeo sent Miller a set of photographs. They were portraits of the artist and possible candidates for reproduction in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog. Though the record of this exchange does not identify the specific images DeFeo mailed to MoMA, it indicates that they were taken by two different photographers – her husband, Wally Hedrick, and their close friend, the artist Wallace Berman. “I’d like to state my preference for Wally Berman’s picture,” DeFeo wrote in the letter that accompanied the photographs, “but if you think anyone of the others better, use it.”306 Hedrick’s photographs resulted from a session that the couple had hurriedly convened after receiving a call from Miller requesting materials for the catalog.307 They snapped somewhat generic “artists’ portraits” of each other: each smokes and looks to one side, Hedrick costumed in a Picassoesque sailor shirt and DeFeo in a dark turtleneck (figs. 1 and 2). The photograph by Berman was most likely drawn from a series of ten prints taken in DeFeo and Hedrick’s apartment the previous spring (figs. 3-12).308

Given the content and look of the photographs in the latter series, it is surprising that DeFeo wanted any of them to represent her publicly. With the exception of a dark headshot, they do not read as portraits (fig. 5). The combination of DeFeo’s performative poses and Berman’s obvious manipulation of the prints gives the images an enigmatic, self-consciously artistic character.309 The photographs variously exceed and undermine portraiture’s imperative to convey likeness. Moreover, all but two of the ten shots depict her naked or partially undressed. Needless to say, DeFeo’s nudity flagrantly violated the conventions governing artists’ portraits in 1950s America. The method of display Berman selected for the series, probably with DeFeo’s input, acknowledged the photographs’ private nature. He exhibited them

306 Jay DeFeo, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, October 19, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
307 Jay DeFeo, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, November 18, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
308 I am fairly certain that the photograph DeFeo sent belongs to the series for two reasons: 1) the prints would have been both available to her and still relatively recent, and 2) there are no other known shots of DeFeo by Berman. The exact parameters of the series are somewhat fuzzy. There is no reliable inventory or photographic record of the images’ from their first exhibition in Berman’s apartment. Also, several negatives exist that were clearly exposed during the photo shoot but probably not printed until the 1970s. (Thus far, I have located four such images.) In this chapter, I define the series as the nine prints currently owned by the Whitney Museum of American Art, which were almost definitely printed by Berman in 1959 (figs. 3-11), and an exposed negative that depicts Berman with DeFeo (fig. 12). I include the latter shot in the original suite even though no original print of it survives because Bruce Conner recalled seeing a photograph that matches its description displayed in Berman’s apartment (Rebecca Schoenthal, North Beach to Haight-Ashbury: Underground Artists and Community in 1950s San Francisco (Diss. University of Virginia, 2005), 290-91). Confusion also surrounds the year the photographs were taken. A postcard that Berman sent DeFeo to arrange the photo shoot (figs. 20 and 21) dates the series to 1959. However, DeFeo wrote “1958” next to her signature on the mat of figure 3. I agree with most scholars that the more likely date is 1959, since it is quite possible that DeFeo signed the print many years after it was developed and thus could have misremembered the year it was taken.
309 Figure 5 is mostly likely the print that DeFeo sent Miller. Despite its dark printing, it resembles the other portraits DeFeo sent, and an announcement for “Hedrick’s S.F. 10th Anniversary” exhibition at the New Mission Gallery shows that the photograph was in DeFeo’s possession in the early 1960s (Wally Hedrick papers, 1954-1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 912).
in a one-day show at his home on Scott Street, where they were seen by invited friends only. In the end, Miller’s decision sealed the photographs’ fate as private images. The curator went against DeFeo’s preference and chose to publish one of Hedrick’s shots on the grounds that “Wally Berman’s trick photograph won’t reproduce.” Reception of the series remained confined to the Fillmore circle until the 1970s.

It is tempting to see a greater significance in the failure of Berman’s photograph to materially register in the “Sixteen Americans” catalog. One wants to read this incident as an allegory for the incongruity between the San Francisco and New York art worlds in the late 1950s (as so many have interpreted The Rose’s absence from the exhibition). In this parable, the photograph represents the Fillmore circle’s private, communal art practice which MoMA’s institutional frame (with its focus on the artist as individual) is literally unable to register. The photograph’s manipulated surface, the source of its irreproducibility, is a failsafe against publicity – a material mechanism preserving the aura of DeFeo, her studio, works, and community. Interpreted this way, the “trick photograph” becomes a trickster photograph, a recalcitrant object mischievously eluding the mainstream art world. The photograph thus emerges as a surrogate for Berman, who is known as a countercultural icon. DeFeo’s request to Miller that the photographs “be returned eventually” because they “were little gifts, of sort, from the people that took them” supports this explanation of the anecdote. Her identification of the photographs as “gifts” foregrounds the entwinement of artistic production and reception with the performance of intimate relationships in the Fillmore circle – an affective, interpersonal dynamic peripheral, at best, to New York’s institutionalized, market-driven art scene.

Is there any truth to this speculative interpretation of what was, if we believe Miller, merely a technical mismatch between Berman’s photograph and the “Sixteen Americans” catalog? If the series does offer an alternative model of authorship from the artist as individual, what is it? What account of creativity do the photographs give through their representation of DeFeo or through the hints they divulge concerning their own facture? Scholarly consensus about the type of authorship that the series both figures and enacted in its production has been as evasive as Berman’s trickster photograph. John Bowles has argued that the series “recognizes the artist as integral to a close-knit community.” His assertion that the series constructs a fundamentally collectivist identity for DeFeo accords with Michael Duncan’s claim that the photographs “are clearly a kind of collaboration.” Carter Ratcliff, by contrast, found the images “well-calculated to promote the cult of genius.” His argument that the photographs represent DeFeo as a creator of “autonomous” works, each with a “single unquestionable

---

310 Berman exhibited the photographs in his home again after moving back to Los Angeles in 1961. Private shows were not uncommon in the Fillmore circle, but in this case the restricted viewing was probably necessary given DeFeo’s nudity.
311 Jay DeFeo, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, October 22, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
312 Photographs from the series were first shown publically in the exhibition “A Kind of Beatness: North Beach in the 1950s,” which was curated by Mark Green at the Focus Gallery in 1975. In a letter from 1978, DeFeo claims that she personally selected two images to hang in the show (Jay DeFeo, letter to Mark Himelstein, June 14, 1978, The Jay DeFeo Trust).
313 Jay DeFeo, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, October 21, 1959, MoMA Archives: Miller Papers, I.15.k.
meaning,“ squarely contradicts Bowles’s and Duncan’s readings of the series as imaging and evidencing communal identity and production.317

The series can accommodate such contradictory readings because of its diversity. The photographs differ not only from customary postwar representations of artists but also from one another. DeFeo underscored the group’s diversity when she commented in a 1978 letter that the prints “do indeed vary in mood and content.”318

One noticeable aspect of the prints’ range is that they portray DeFeo “in various guises.”319 Standing before The Rose, she plays the role of divine creator (figs. 3 and 4). The combination of high-contrast, side lighting and the alignment of her splayed body with the canvas’s radial composition creates the illusion that the painting emanates, halo-like, from her commanding form. By rehearsing the well-worn association between radiating light and creation ex nihilo (think of William Blake’s The Ancient of Days (1794)) the photographs make the Romantic equation between artist and God and thus support Ratcliff’s interpretation of the series.320 Berman’s collaged addition of the Hebrew letter צ (Tsade) on DeFeo’s chest adds to the image’s Old-Testament overtones.321

However, other images in the group are not quite as “well-calculated to promote the cult of genius.”322 The stool sequence casts DeFeo in the role of the artist’s model instead of the divine artist (figs. 7-10). Her body is now a receptive surface for light (embodied by the tinsel) rather than the source emitting it. The floppy, broad-brimmed hat and long string of beads she sports were accessories she used when modeling (clothened) at the California School of Fine Arts.323 In one photograph, DeFeo grabs and lifts her breasts, presenting them to the lens (fig.

---

317 Ibid. All three authors offer little evidence to support their readings, making it difficult to evaluate them. Duncan appears to base his assumption of the photographs’ collaborative facture on the dynamic nature of DeFeo’s poses, while Ratcliff reads genius from DeFeo’s “hieratic poses in front of The Rose” (13).
319 Martha Prather, “Beside The Rose: DeFeo’s Work at the Whitney Museum,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, ed. Jane Green and Leah Levy (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2003), xvi-xvii. Prather is one of the few authors to helpfully foreground the series’ diversity.
320 Indeed, this is the only image from the series that Ratcliff cites. The photograph may have been inspired by William Blake’s poem “To God” (c. 1808), which Berman published in Semina 4 (1959). DeFeo felt a special affinity towards the verse (Dana Miller, “I Should Go to the Very Center,” Jay DeFeo: No End (Santa Fe: Dwight Hackett Projects, 2006)). The image’s alignment of her body with the painting’s radial burst may answer the poem’s command: “If you have form’d a circle to go into, Go into it yourself, and see how you would do.” DeFeo’s other work featured in the photographs, The Eyes, was inspired by an untitled poem by Philip Lamantia that was published in the same issue of Berman’s journal. Semina 4 clearly served as a reference for the series, but the exact nature of their connection is unclear and deserves further study.
321 For an extensive discussion of the implications of Berman’s use of the letter Tsade in this work see Robert Berg, “Jay DeFeo: The Transcendental Rose,” American Art, Autumn 1998, 68-77. Berg identifies several things that Tsade represents, including “The Lord of Life” and, according to numerology, DeFeo’s name.
322 Ratcliff, 12.
323 Undated snapshots in the collection of The Jay DeFeo Trust show the artist posing with these accessories in a classroom at the CSFA/San Francisco Art Institute. Judging from the print quality and the clothing worn by the
10). This blunt gesture leaves little doubt that her body is on display for the viewer’s delectation. Here, she performs the fantasy of the promiscuous life model, whose availability to artistic representation is inseparable from her sexual availability.

The two sequences, in sum, offer conflicting accounts of artistic production: the image of autonomous, visionary creation staged with *The Rose* contrasts with the representational procedures implied by the artist’s model. In the former, the studio is a site of isolation; in the latter, it is a site of encounter. They also cast her in opposite roles within the familiar, sexist drama of the studio. Standing before *The Rose*, DeFeo is the omnipotent agent of creation whose imposing yet ethereal form radiates generative power. Posing on the stool, she is the object of creation, the gaze, and the artist’s amorous advances – the artwork’s content rather than its cause. The sequences also differently gender her body in accordance with the binary positions traditionally assigned men and women in the creative process. The high-contrast *Rose* shots androgynize DeFeo’s lean form by blackening out the telling torso. Her commanding pose – the rigidity of which is amplified by the painting’s strict geometries – gives her form a decidedly masculine connotation. In the model photographs, by contrast, DeFeo assumes languid and suggestive poses, some of which foreground her sexual difference and blatantly refer to pornographic conventions.324

The photographs’ authorship is as slippery as their portrayal of the artist. At question is the nature of DeFeo’s contribution to the series. Did she participate with Berman in the aesthetic and conceptual decision-making that shaped the photographs, or was she simply a tool through which Berman realized his autonomous vision? The evidence is contradictory.325 Both Berman and DeFeo signed the mat of the front-facing *Rose* photograph, a gesture of joint authorship which suggests that they created the suite (or, at least, this photograph) together (fig. 3). DeFeo’s description, twenty years later, of the series as “an objective collaboration between two artist friends” seems to support this account of its production.326 However, in a letter written just months after the above statement, DeFeo portrayed her participation in the photographs’ creation in a way that decisively conflicts with the idea of mutual making evoked by the term ‘collaboration’:

I am not entirely happy with Wallace’s portraits, but seldom have models been altogether happy with artists’ conceptions of them. I did not feel it was appropriate to intervene and edit Wallace’s

---

324 Scholars have given very different accounts of the role gender plays in the series. Interpretations of its representation of DeFeo’s gender and sexuality vary widely because writers tend to base their arguments on only a handful of images. Focusing primarily on *The Rose* photograph, for example, Schoenthal concludes that, “Berman’s images of DeFeo are decidedly demure” (296-97). From this selective analysis, she concludes that the series is a “visual manifestation of Berman’s own mostly emotional androgyny” (297-98). In direct contrast, Richard Cândida Smith bases his interpretation on the suite’s more “provocative” shots, claiming that Berman represented “his friend as a female stereotype” to parody her sexualization in the mainstream press (*The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 120).

325 The Whitney divides authorship between the pair, assigning some of the photographs to Berman and others to DeFeo. It is not immediately apparent what criteria the Museum used to determine these attributions.

326 Jay DeFeo, letter to *Artforum*, undated (c. 1978), The Jay DeFeo Trust. In the same sentence, she also refers to the series as “an early experiment in erotic photography.” I think the term “objective” is supposed to quell any suspicions of a sexual relationship between herself and Berman.
In these two statements, DeFeo’s characterization of her contribution to the series vacillates between the seemingly incongruous roles she plays in the photographs: she imagines herself as, alternately, artist and model, co-creator and mere content. In these two statements, DeFeo’s characterization of her contribution to the series vacillates between the seemingly incongruous roles she plays in the photographs: she imagines herself as, alternately, artist and model, co-creator and mere content.327

This chapter takes as its starting point the confounding contradictions that give the series its tricky character. Though Berman and DeFeo occasionally authorized individual images from the suite to be viewed independently, they appear to have regarded the photographs as collectively producing an integrated meaning. Their understanding of the photographs as forming a single (if heterogeneous) unit makes examining the series as a whole imperative. Looking at the photographs together (rather than as isolated images, as past commentators have done) means taking seriously the challenges they pose, as a group, to established categories of representation, gender, and authorship. To articulate the kind of artistic identity and creativity the series proposes, in other words, I must examine its perverse play with the binary oppositions (between artist and model, creator and content, expressionism and naturalism, individual and collective, and male and female) that typically structure accounts of artists as social and creative beings. What accounts for the series’ construction of opposing identities for DeFeo? What model of production does the photographs’ ambiguous authorship suggest?

I approach these questions contextually, by situating the series within the visual culture of representing artists in postwar America, the archival evidence of the photographs’ production, and Berman’s larger photographic practice. My hypothesis is that the suite imagines an ideal mode of artistic creation that integrates Ratcliff’s autonomous act with Bowles’ and Duncan’s communal collaboration. Rather than pin down the photographs’ meaning, my interpretation explores their persistent recalcitrance. The perceptually and conceptually obscure images invite viewers to project into them, to imaginatively fill the voids they generate in vision, meaning, and

---

327 DeFeo, letter to Himelstein, April 20, 1978. It is certainly significant that the first description was written for *Artforum*, while the second was written for her lawyer in the context of her law suit against *Artforum* (which is described in the conclusion of this chapter). I do not think, however, this difference in intended audience fully accounts for the letters’ opposing characterizations of her participation in the photographs’ production.

328 Clearly, gender is central to the difficult questions the series raises about authorship. Though the details of Berman and DeFeo’s interaction during the photo shoot remain wildly unsettled, the general setup – a clothed man photographing a naked woman – replays the misogynist dynamics of the studio as it has traditionally been conceived in the West (Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992)). This association brings ethical urgency to the questions of agency and objectification, identity and alienation generated by the ambiguity surrounding DeFeo’s participation in the photographs’ production.

329 I use the term “tricky” here because it invokes Miller’s description of Berman’s print and because both its meanings (i.e., wily and difficult to deal with) are applicable to the series.

330 The two times Berman exhibited the photographs, he displayed them together. Several statements from DeFeo’s 1978 correspondence with *Artforum* and Himelstein indicate that she thought of them as a unit. In the passage quoted above, for example, she refers to the photographs not as a series of portraits but, rather, as a “series portrait.” She repeats this sentiment more vehemently in an interview with Rebecca Solnit from March 12, 1984: “[Berman] wanted to do a series of portraits that was a composite portrait. . . . [T]here have since been incidents where a single portrait out of that group has been . . . separated and used without my permission. . . . I took great exception to that because I thought that out of the context of the whole it misrepresented me . . . , having something like that shown in isolation without any understanding of what the whole picture was” (Interviews for the book *Secret Exhibition*, Phonotape 4000 C: 1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley). I am grateful to Ms. Solnit for granting me access to her rich collection of recordings.
history. The following takes the series’ provocative character as its object of analysis, but it is also a record of the process of speculative looking that the series prompted me to pursue.

The Artist as Symbol

Berman and DeFeo’s private images coexisted with several photographs of her with The Rose that circulated in art-press and mass-media publications before the painting’s public debut at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1969.331 Though taken slightly later, the public photographs help situate the pair’s photo-series in relation to popular, contemporary conventions for representing American artists. The following compares the Fillmore suite’s photographs of DeFeo and The Rose with two widely-circulated photographs – one taken by the Magnum photographer Burt Glinn in 1960, the other by Burchard in 1959 – to begin to articulate the specific account of creativity and artistic identity crafted by the former.

Glinn’s photograph was reproduced in Creative America, a coffee-table book published by the United States government in 1962 to raise funds for the National Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. It is a standard specimen of Cold-War cultural propaganda. Much like the Brussels World’s Fair of 1958, the book argues that creative activity affirms the maker’s and beholder’s “individuality and humanity.”332 The volume asserts this sanguine notion through essays by politicians (including John F. Kennedy and Dwight Eisenhower) and cultural luminaries (such as James Baldwin) interspersed between Life-like montages of Magnum photographs.333

Glinn’s shot takes up nearly the entire right page of a spread in the final section, titled “Aspirations” (fig. 13).334 The photograph crops out the canvas’s borders, severing the painting from its studio context. DeFeo (sporting casual brown trousers and Converse high-tops) perches at the apex of a ladder in the center of the composition. Her hunched posture and raised right arm suggest concentration — that she is absorbed in the act of painting — though her bowed head blocks our view of her palette knife. From the top left of the spread, a horizontally-oriented photograph of a cowboy nudges onto the right-hand page. The photograph was taken by Ernst

331 Photographs of The Rose were reproduced in the following publications: Sixteen Americans (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959); Painting and Sculpture in the San Francisco Art Association: A Catalog of the Art Bank of the SFAA, 1959-60 (San Francisco: SFAA, 1959); “New Talent U.S.A.,” Art in America, Spring 1961; Kenneth Tynan, “San Francisco: The Rebels,” Holiday, April 1961; Creative America (New York: Ridge Press, 1962); and John F. Kennedy, “The Arts in America,” Look, December 1962. The bulk of media coverage shifted from art press to mainstream publications in 1961. This change might indicate the art world’s waning interest in The Rose. Miller and Walter Hopps, director of the Ferus Gallery, were instrumental in the painting’s continued public presence via reproduction. Miller selected DeFeo to be featured in “New Talent U.S.A.,” and Hopps arranged for Magnum photographer Burt Glinn to photograph DeFeo with her painting in 1960. Glinn’s photographs were reproduced in three publications (Holiday, Creative America, and Look), accounting for the majority of the painting’s mass-media coverage. The relationship between the painting and the circulating photographs of it is a topic that deserves further study. Prather claims that the photographic mediation between public and unfinished work that occurred with The Rose was unprecedented (x). I agree that this might be the case for paintings, but a similar phenomenon occurred with Kurt Schwitters’ Merzbau (1919-37). DeFeo may have been aware of the similarity; in the 1970s, she named her dog Merz.

332 Creative America, 3.

333 Kennedy’s essay, for example, blatantly champions the United States as the land of capitalist freedom. Having defined the arts as a form of self-expression, he claims that they are thus consistent with the luxurious lifestyle of post-war America, with its many consumerist possibilities for self-fulfillment (John F. Kennedy, “The Arts in America,” Creative America, 4-8).

334 The structure of the book traces the “circle of creation” across many art forms, weaving a broad, universalizing narrative with marked nationalist overtones (3). Unlike the photographs in other sections, those in “Aspirations” lack captions, suggesting that they were intended to function more as metaphors than illustrations.
Haas, another Magnum photographer who (unsurprisingly) shot several ad campaigns for Marlboro cigarettes. The low angle-of-view gives the mounted man a monumental stature; his hat and broad shoulders break the ridgeline of the golden hills in front of him. The stark tonal contrast between foreground and background reduces the man, and his steed, to a brawny silhouette cast dramatically against the desert vista into which they stride.

The juxtaposition invites the viewer to draw analogies – that are at once clichéd and strained – between the two captionless images. Glinn’s Technicolor film gives The Rose’s cool grays a hot cast, suggesting a consonance between the painting’s craggy ridges and the desolate panorama to its right. The infinite projection of the painting’s radial composition reinforces its resemblance to the sublime expanse. Moreover, both figures turn away from the viewer and towards the terrain before them. Through these formal echoes, the montage analogizes DeFeo’s creative activity to a cowboy traversing the wilderness. The spread thus represents painting as a risky adventure that necessitates courage, perseverance, and self-reliance. Creativity, the montage asserts, is a solitary activity – a heroic exercise of independence. The layout thus rehearses the well-worn metaphors articulated in Harold Rosenberg’s influential 1952 essay, “The American Action Painters,” in which he likens the abstract-expressionist artist to archetypes of the American West in order to champion their spontaneous, gestural process as one of existential risk and freedom. It is ironic that the montage de-individualizes both DeFeo and the mounted man to communicate its message of artistic individualism. The faceless, captionless images transform both from specific people into personifications of individualism. Given the strongly masculine coding of the heroic persona that DeFeo is made to embody, it is unsurprising that her gender is one of the distinguishing details the layout conceals.

Berman’s and Glinn’s photographs share important compositional features. Notably, both restrict the photograph’s field-of-view within the painting’s borders, unmooring the work from its surrounds and collapsing the canvas’s surface with the photograph’s picture plane. Both also center the artist’s body. In each image, the combination of decontextualizing cropping and the prominence of the artist’s body gives her a strong and autonomous authorial presence. Each photograph, however, focuses this image of the commanding, independent creator through a different mythological lens. While the Creative America spread draws on the imagery of the American West to represent the artist as an adventurer, Berman borrows from the Romantic tradition to represent the artist as God.

Berman was not the only photographer to portray DeFeo and The Rose as otherworldly. Burchard’s photograph (which was published in the 1959/60 Art Bank catalog) also uses

---

335 Admittedly, the direction in which the man and his horse are facing is extremely ambiguous. However, the cowboy’s stirruped foot, which projects in front of the horse’s chest, signals that they are facing into the landscape. If they were oriented towards the viewer, the man’s visible leg would be too long for his body and his other leg, which would be closest to the picture plane, should visibly project under the horse.

336 Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” Art News, December 1952, 22+. It is important to note that many aspects of Glinn’s photograph unsettle the analogy that the layout establishes between artist and adventurer. For example, DeFeo’s careful concentration decidedly lacks the galloping cowboy’s dynamism, and the canvas’s vertical orientation contrasts with the horizontality of the Western landscape. These tensions in the montage point to the ways in which DeFeo’s painting process – in its duration, recursivity, detail, and use of an upright support – diverged from the stereotypical abstract-expressionist gesture, immortalized by Hans Namuth’s photographs of Jackson Pollock which clearly haunt the Creative America spread.

337 Cropping the painting so that it is mostly or completely contained within the photograph’s frame is unusually common in depictions of The Rose. Though I suggest more ideological reasons for this formal trope above, it probably arose, in part, due to the specific challenges of photographing the monumental, vertical canvas.
dramatic lighting to give the painting an ethereal cast (fig. 14). Sunlight pours into DeFeo’s otherwise dark studio from unseen windows behind and to either side of the canvas, which is centered in the rectangular print. The raking light catches the painting’s spoke-like ridges, glinting off slicks of oily white and mica-infused highlights. As in Berman’s photograph, this indirect illumination creates the illusion that *The Rose* is shooting rays of light from its center. Backlit before her radiating work, DeFeo is little more than a silhouette. Indeed, her body is more obscured here than it is in Berman’s photograph. She is a negative shape carved into her dazzling painting – visible, yet a hole in vision; a presence that also reads as an absence. Unlike in Berman’s and Glinn’s shots, she occupies neither the center of the photograph nor the center of the painting. The canvas looms over her as she stands on the floor before it. Her turning posture suggests that the photographer/viewer has interrupted her solitary labor, causing her to look away from the canvas. Though the viewer cannot make out painting implements in DeFeo’s hands, the table filled with canisters and utensils to the right of the canvas bolsters the suggested scenario of interrupted production. Contrary to his contemporaries, Burchard depicts the painting in its studio context, a choice which encourages the viewer to imaginatively project himself into the room. The encroaching darkness gives the space a sense of hushed enclosure.

Burchard represents DeFeo in accordance with contemporary conventions for depicting the artist as a mystic. Like Hans Namuth’s 1952 photograph of Barnet Newman (discussed in the previous chapter), it portrays the studio as a sanctuary (ch. 2, fig. 24). Though her dim studio resembles a temple (with *The Rose* as its altar) more than a monastic cell, it conveys a similar sense of cloistered isolation to Newman’s loft. Burchard’s use of ethereal lighting to deemphasize the artist’s body also resonates with Namuth’s shot: in both photographs, the artist appears diminutive and spectral. Indeed, both images downplay labor in order to portray artistic creation as primarily metaphysical – as a contemplative, interiorized, and mysterious activity. By attributing characteristics commonly associated with divine creation to DeFeo’s artistic production, Burchard cast her in the familiar role of the Romantic genius.

By attributing characteristics commonly associated with divine creation to DeFeo’s artistic production, Burchard cast her in the familiar role of the Romantic genius.

In the context of the Art Bank catalog, this mysterious persona served the purpose of alluring potential patrons. Burchard’s photograph was reproduced in the section of the catalog that lists the Art Bank’s members. Each entry includes the artist’s name, current address, brief professional biography, and a black-and-white, thumbnail reproduction of one work. DeFeo’s entry violates this format in two telling ways: she leaves out her biography, and she includes a photograph of *The Rose in situ*. No other painting reproduced in the catalog is shown in an environment. Unlike the bios of the other artists in the catalog, DeFeo’s entry acts as a caption for the photograph below it; her address identifies the location shown in the photograph and thus reinforces the painting’s attachment to a specific location. It also reads as an invitation to curious viewers to see the work in person. The play in the image between entry and distance generates an alluring sense of mystery. It preserves a sense of privacy while piquing viewers’ curiosity, enticing them over the threshold. In this way, Burchard’s photograph conveys both the experience of aura (the reverential distance one feels in the presence of a great artwork) and its cause (the work’s singularity in time and space). DeFeo’s inclusion of the photograph in the Art Bank catalog demonstrates how (contrary to Walter Benjamin) the circulation of mechanical

---

338 The exact date of Burchard’s photograph is unknown. It seems likely that he shot it at the same time as the photographs for “The Individual and his World,” probably in the summer of 1959.

339 These assumptions about the cause of the photograph’s light effects are based on my examination of the finished painting.
reproductions can boost, rather than drain, a work’s aura. It also shows how the stereotype of the isolated artist could be turned into a clever marketing tool.

Both Glinn and Burchard, then, represented DeFeo according to characterizations of the artist as individual that were popularized for depicting abstract-expressionist artists. While the personas of adventurer and mystic inflect DeFeo’s autonomy differently, both depict the artist and her creative process as removed from society. In keeping with the values of postwar America, both images also show the artist’s independence in a positive light, as a trait deserving of respect, even reverence. By likening DeFeo’s painting process to a cowboy traversing the desert, Creative America encourages the viewer to respect the artist for her courageous assertion of freedom in the face of risk, while Burchard’s photograph attempts to inspire awe in her creative activity by representing it as mysterious and divine.

Berman and DeFeo’s Rose photographs incorporate key formal aspects of both tropes. They combine the composition of Glinn’s image of the artist as adventurer (its centered figure and close cropping) with the etherealized lighting of Burchard’s image of the artist as mystic. The resulting hybrid articulates a purer version of expressionism than either public photograph conveys. By centering the artist within the seemingly self-illuminated painting, the photograph creates the illusion that the work emanates from her naked body. In this way, it manifests the expressionist ideal of creation as pure presence – the idea (which peaked in postwar discussions of Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings) that the work is a direct reflection or index of its maker. The photograph’s ethereal lighting alludes to the biblical roots of this model of making (to the origins of creation ex nihilo in the Judeo-Christian God’s conjuration of the universe from nothing with the declaration “Let there be light!”), while its decontextualizing cropping captures the absolute autonomy this model accords the creative act. DeFeo’s closed eyes in the front-facing photograph further suggest the interior source of her creative powers; her impassive face and ecstatic pose suggest that she is lost in a visionary trance. In this way, the image represents artistic production as a mystical communion and thus reiterates the well-worn Romantic equation between artistic inspiration and divine inspiration.

Berman and DeFeo’s photographs crystallize the expressionist model of creativity suggested by the public photographs, but they do so in a curious way – by abstaining from the depiction of DeFeo’s actual painting process. While Burchard’s shot downplays facture, the pairs’ photographs banish all signifiers of artistic labor. Their flattened images completely extrude the studio space and its telling trappings (brushes, palette knives, paint cans, etc.). Without outside knowledge of DeFeo and her work (which the intended audience, of course, possessed) it would be impossible to determine that the photographs are about specifically artistic creation. Indeed, the images’ amalgamation of Glinn’s disorienting cropping with Burchard’s surreal lighting makes it difficult to identify The Rose as an artwork. Fragmented and blanched, it barely reads as a material object, let alone as a painting. Moreover, DeFeo’s closed eyes and static pose establish a relationship between her body and the canvas that defies

340 Glinn and Burchard use opposing spatial structures – expansiveness and encroachment, respectively – to represent DeFeo’s independence. The former depicts the self as boldly exteriorized, intrepidly facing the unknown, while the latter represents her as cloistered and inward turning. In sum, Creative America portrays DeFeo’s autonomy as a function of isolation (she is a lone explorer in the wilderness), while the Art Bank catalog portrays her autonomy as a function of privacy (she is a holy hermit in her cave).
341 This illusion is less stable in the back-facing shot. There, she appears to strive to align her limbs with the painting’s spokes, as if fusing with its mandalic design. This dance of mimicry literalizes the expressionist mantra that the canvas is a mirror, but it also hints at the potentially destabilizing effects of the artist’s identification with her work – chiefly, abjection or the loss of a defined, coherent self.
the interaction (the contact through vision and touch) between painter and painting, maker and made. As both intimately bodily and seemingly metaphysical, her naked communion with *The Rose* looks nothing like the many actions (the drawing, mixing, brushing, daubing, plastering, chiseling, scrapping, sanding, etc.) she used to produce the work.342

In sum, while Berman’s photographs construct a familiar expressionist identity for DeFeo, they do so using a unique pictorial mode. Rather than picturing the scene of production, as both Glinn and Burchard do, Berman deploys artist and work in a symbolic staging of creation *ex nihilo*.343 His photographs read as allegories of creativity, not as documents of it. While the other photographs position the viewer as a witness to (or, more accurately in the case of Burchard’s image, as an interrupter of) artistic action, Berman’s photographs ask to be decoded. And like all respectable allegories, Berman’s use the nude female figure. Other formal aspects of the photographs reinforce their emblematic character. Their flatness, centrality, and geometric linearity give the images an iconic, diagrammatic feel.344 In addition, DeFeo’s hieratic pose and the high-contrast printing – which gives her form a squashed, graphic quality – renders her body schematic. Indeed, many commentators have noted the striking resemblance between *The Rose* photographs and Leonardo da Vinci’s famous diagrammatic drawing of the “Vitruvian Man” (c. 1487).345 Like the *Creative America* spread, then, Berman’s photographs de-individualize DeFeo, but they do so in a more deliberate way. Rather than simply concealing her identity, they abstract her body (her specific, material form) into a symbol (a generalized and insubstantial figure). Universalization is encoded into the formal fabric of Berman’s photographs.346 The inclusion of a *literal* symbol (the Tsade) in or, more accurately, on the photograph reinforces the image’s emblematic character, specifically its representation of the body as a fundamental code.347

Why did Berman and/or DeFeo choose to represent artistic creation symbolically? The contrast between Glinn’s and Burchard’s photographs seems to indicate that the choice was unusual (if not unprecedented) for the period. Was their selection of this distinctive form motivated by the images’ private nature? Did a specific emblem or category of symbolic

---

342 This curious mix of physical and metaphysical labor is another way Berman and DeFeo’s *Rose* photographs combine the tropes of artist as adventurer and artist as mystic.

343 By asking the viewer to read the images “as,” Berman’s photographs of DeFeo with *The Rose* overtly manifest the metaphorical form that people commonly used to construct artistic identity in the period.

344 In both *Rose* shots, the painting’s edges fall beyond the photograph’s frame. This framing appears to collapse the canvas with the photograph’s picture plane. What little hints of depth remain (such as that created by the small platform DeFeo stands on in the front-facing photograph) are unstable or completely disorienting. In the back-facing shot, Berman tightens the photograph’s frame even more closely around DeFeo’s body, completely eliminating the ground beneath her. Unmoored from perspectival space, the relationship between body and backdrop becomes surreal. At moments, the image appears utterly flat. The stark contrast between DeFeo’s blanched sides and the painting’s mottled surface perceptually compress the edges of her body to paper thinness. Her form appears superimposed – collaged onto the laminated surface of painting and photograph. At other moments, however, the image’s extreme flatness gives way to extreme depth. The resemblance of the painting’s radial design to one-point perspective creates the illusion of a vortex into which DeFeo’s body appears to fall, assuming cosmic proportions against a now-infinite backdrop. In short, the image utterly disorients as it shutters between flatness and zooming volume, vertical and horizontal, and human and cosmic scales.

345 Writers who have discussed this likeness include Berg (72), Prather (xvi), and Schoenthal (293-95).

346 Recall, however, that the original audience for the images was intimately familiar with DeFeo and her painting. Unlike the readers of *Creative America*, their personal knowledge of the artist would have counterbalanced the photographs’ dispossession of her individual identity.

347 The letter’s outstretched shape also mimics DeFeo’s pose. The photograph not only represents her as a surface for inscription, then; it also likens her to a sign through formal analogy.
imagery inspire the photographs? Furthermore, what are the implications of the photographs’ symbolic form for the meanings they craft? Does the photographs’ atypical semiotic mode (the fact that they read as emblems rather than images) affect or complicate the pedestrian account of creativity (expressionism) and artistic identity (individual genius) they seem to communicate?

Exposure and Concealment

Not all of the photographs in the series impersonate symbols. The sequence that depicts DeFeo as an artist’s model (figs. 7-10) overturns the geometric flatness that gives The Rose shots their diagrammatic character. Though still highly performative, her poses are languid. The light follows DeFeo’s lead: the flinty, arrow-like rays melt into showers of tinsel. Her reclining postures also give the photographs dimensionality. The prints’ dramatic *tenebroso* adds to their sense of depth, as highlights seem to carve out swells of flesh from the palpable darkness. In sum, while The Rose photographs collapse and cement DeFeo’s form into an immediately graspable shape, the model photographs emphasize the malleability and materiality of her body, which they present in so many glimpses. As the introduction demonstrates, this contrast is just one in a long list of antitheses between the two sets of photographs. Recognizing the symbolic character of The Rose images, however, also illuminates an obscured similarity between the sequences: though one depicts DeFeo as a sign to be decoded and the other depicts her as a body to be represented, they both present her as an object of scrutiny.

The model shots also resembled those with The Rose in that they, too, had counterparts in the popular visual culture of postwar America. Specifically, they resonated with contemporary representations of American women artists, such as “Women Artists in Ascendance” (1957), a now-notorious *Life* magazine article which was published two years before Berman and DeFeo’s photo shoot (figs. 15-16). The four-page photo-essay featured five young, Caucasian female artists (Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Nell Blaine, Joan Mitchell, and Jane Wilson), most of whom painted in the style of Abstract Expressionism. In other words, they resembled DeFeo, except for the New York location of their studios. Though surrounded by their works, none of the five artists is shown *at work*. All assume relaxed, mostly sitting, postures—which range from self-enfolding to supine. Their limp inertness sharply contrasts with the dynamic image of the “American Action Painter.” As Anne M. Wagner observed, the artists’ paintings are displayed as decoration rather than as works-in-progress. They hang framed and off the easel or masquerade as décor; Helen Frankenthaler sits on her unstretched painting as if it were a living-room rug. Like their paintings, the artists are consciously on display. With the exception of Nell Blaine, the women meet the camera’s gaze, and they have clearly dressed for the media attention. They are painted instead of painting. Unlike male abstract expressionists, who are almost always depicted absorbed in the act of painting or lost in introspective reverie, the female artists blatantly assume the role of the viewed object.

The article’s subliminal identification of the female artist with the artist’s model becomes explicit in the large photograph of Jane Wilson that concludes the spread. Wilson, whom the

---

348 “Women Artists in Ascendance,” *Life*, May 13, 1957, 74-77. The article’s subtitle (“Young group reflects lively virtues of American painting”) indicates the undercurrent of dismissal that pervades the colorful spread. The choice of the word “reflects” characterizes the artists as passive conduits for the nation’s recent cultural achievements, rather than as the originators of them.


350 Ibid. Mitchell presents her unstretched canvas to the viewer like a clerk measuring cloth in a fabric store.

351 Ibid.
accompanying text notes is not only a devoted painter but also a “New York fashion model . . . married to a composer,” reclines on a chaise lounge under an impressionistic painting (presumably her own) of a voluptuous nude in a blue chair. Her luxuriating pose offers her body up to the viewer, likening that body to the glass of grapes on the table in front of her. The composition also compares the artist’s body to the model’s body in the painting behind her and, in doing so, positions the viewer in the artist’s shoes. Blaine’s portrait makes the conflation of viewer and artist even more overt by stationing the viewer next to the artist’s work table. Here, the viewer peers at the artist from over her palette, which is made his own by proximity.

Life’s photo-essay suggests how difficult it was for women to occupy the role of artist in postwar America. It evidences the women’s exclusion from the heroic, individualistic subjectivity associated with the style they painted in. Griselda Pollock has shown how the period’s liberal humanist ideals perpetuated this exclusion. The text of “Women Artists in Ascendance” indicates as much. It announces that the featured artists “have won acclaim not as notable women artists but as notable artists who happen to be women.” Even though the article takes the artists’ gender as its organizing principle, it hesitates to make gender count. Women artists slightly younger than DeFeo would begin to recognize by the early 1960s that – far from leveling the playing field between individuals – the universalizing rhetoric of postwar humanism perpetuated inequities by making difference unspeakable.

DeFeo clearly takes up the role of model differently than do her peers in Life. Instead of dressing up for the camera, she disrobes, exaggerating their self-display and veiled seductiveness into explicitly lascivious poses. These modifications bring the subtext of Life’s representation to the surface: DeFeo bluntly assumes the part of the artist’s model and the expectations of sexual availability that come with it. Clarifying how DeFeo performed the role of artist’s model, however, does not fully elucidate why she performed it. What motivated Berman’s and/or DeFeo’s curious decision to represent the artist as an artist’s model? Does their version of this identity reference a specific source, and if so, how does it comment on that originating context? How would the series’ initial Fillmore audience have perceived its portrayal of DeFeo as a model?

The cultural historian Richard Cándida Smith has read the series as DeFeo and Berman’s defiant response to contemporary representations of women artists. Drawing on photographs from the stool sequence, he argues that the series parodies the media’s sexualization of DeFeo in particular. While the blatant bawdiness of some shots (figure 10, for instance) pushes her performance to the edge of parody, the tone of the series as a whole is far too elusive to be a outright mockery. Indeed, even in most of the model shots (such as figures 7 and 9) it is unclear whether she is playing the role of model or playing with that role. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that the images spoof the media’s representation of women artists specifically. DeFeo had received scant press attention when the photographs were taken, and it is unlikely that either Berman or DeFeo would have recognized the sexism of articles like

352 This elision occurs despite the notable differences between artist and model. Everything about Wilson – from her plucked eyebrows to her taut curls and cinched waist – is prim and contained in contrast to the model’s tumult of flesh.


354 “Ascendance,” 74.

355 Cándida Smith, 119-20. He applies this reading to the series in general, not just to the model shots. The main image he analyzes to make this argument was not included in the original series; it depicts DeFeo wearing nothing but heals and leaning on a mop in the middle of her kitchen.
“Women Artists in Ascendance” prior to the mid-1960s, when the Women’s Liberation Movement raised consciousness about the media’s perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

The photograph in which Berman appears with DeFeo suggests that the series’ more satirical images poke fun at the prudishness of postwar America, rather than at depictions of women artists (figure 12). The shot captures the pair posing in a mirror. DeFeo’s painting, *The Annunciation* (1957-59), hangs in the background. The tinsel that drapes around her shoulders and falls over her exposed right breast links the photograph to those of her posing on the stool. The manifestation of Berman and his camera in front of the lens gives the image a “behind the scenes” feel, as if it pulled back the curtain to reveal the conditions of the series’ production – specifically, the relationship between photographer and model. The photograph presents a stereotypical account of that relationship: DeFeo embodies the objectified model, and Berman epitomizes the virile artist. She is naked, while he is clothed. She closes her eyes, while he stares directly at the viewer. His erect body supports her drooping form, as she acquiesces to his groping right hand. Berman enacts the fantasy of the artist’s unmediated access to the model’s body by grabbing her breast. His gesture crudely equates the camera and DeFeo’s breast and, thus, conflates sex and artistic creation, a concept which is foundational to the sexist mythology of the modernist studio. Here, Berman is in control of vision, the female body, and the creative act, and DeFeo is the material he possesses, both perceptually and physically. The shot, in short, contradicts DeFeo’s later assertion (which their joint signing of *The Rose* photographic supports) that the series was “an objective collaboration between artist friends” by deliberately performing the opposite extreme: the sexualized and hierarchical relationship between artist and model.

Berman’s slack-jawed expression, however, unsettles the authenticity of the pair’s embodiment of artist and model, pushing the representation from stereotype to caricature. His archive contains several snapshots (figure 17, for example) in which he sports similar looks of exaggerated astonishment. Usually the expressions signal his playful reaction to kitsch items that sensationalize Beat culture, such as a poster about the dangers of marijuana. In these photographs, that is, Berman lampoons the mainstream’s priggish response to his subcultural lifestyle. Mobilized in the context of Berman and DeFeo’s photo shoot, the expression seems to predict and parody reductive interpretations of the series as titillating and scandalous (as, in other words, evidence of a sexual relationship between the friends). By poking fun at an imagined public, for whom the photographs were never intended, the shot confirms the series’ private nature. Those who viewed the suite at Berman’s home would likely have gotten the joke, and their laughter would have confirmed their insider status. It is less clear, however, if DeFeo was in on the punch line; her serene expression lacks Berman’s playful performativity and remains enigmatic.

Berman’s treatment of DeFeo’s naked body in a manner he usually reserved for Beat artifacts suggests that the sequence should be seen as part of his countercultural championing of sex and the body. Many of Berman’s works, such as his assemblage *Cross* (1957), combine religious and pornographic imagery (fig. 18). Given their fusion of ethereal lighting and

---

356 The shot disrupts the elision between viewer and photographer constructed by the other model images. Here, Berman declares his difference from the viewer by asserting his direct access to the model’s body, an action which the obscuring techniques used to print the images prevent viewers from imagining.


358 *Cross* mixes a weathered, wooden cross, a parchment painted with Hebrew letters, and a photograph of heterosexual coitus. The “money shot” is abstracted through extreme close-up to resemble a mandala. Now lost,
sexually explicit content, the model shots certainly fit this template. Mixing the sacred and the profane was a characteristic Beat strategy of cultural rebellion. By likening the carnal to the transcendental in his art, Berman sought to redeem sexual experience from its demonization in repressive postwar culture. Viewed in this context, the model shots advocate the erotic, rather than condemn it.

A negative which Berman exposed but never printed suggests that one way the series attempted to revalue the sexualized, female body was to revise its role in the creative process (fig. 19). The shot combines aspects of the model sequence with characteristics of the artist sequence: DeFeo sits on a stool in front of The Rose. Though she is seated, her body is tense, like it is in the photographs of her standing before the painting. Although the photograph is explicit, it is not erotic. She spreads her labia (as she does in figure 11) but her rigidity, as well as the dark shadow between her legs, renders the gesture unexpectedly chaste. The adamant quality of her pose and the camera’s monumentalizing angle-of-view give her a powerful presence. She also throws back her head and opens her mouth as if emitting a song or yell. Her open mouth and vagina visually rhyme with each other and with the center of the painting, which is just above and to the left of DeFeo’s head. The painted rays converging above her synesthetically evoke the sound waves of that she appears to bellow forth, adding to the vision of her as a commanding creator.

By analogizing DeFeo’s sexed form with her painting’s form, the shot seems to claim her body as the source of her work. The image contains two possible readings of this relationship. First, The Rose’s iconography could be inspired by her anatomy, à la Judy Chicago’s central-core imagery. Second, the photograph could be seen to offer an even more radical revision of the

---

like most of Berman’s early assemblages, Cross gained notoriety as the piece in his 1956 Ferus Gallery show that led to his arrest and conviction on obscenity charges, the traumatic event which sparked his move north. For a detailed account and analysis of the incident see Ken D. Allan, “City of Degenerate Angels: Wallace Berman, Jazz and Semina in Postwar Los Angeles,” Art Journal, Spring 2011, 70-91. Notably, DeFeo also mined pornographic sources for her photo-collages of 1958. In Blossom and Applaud the Black Fact, she used whole and fragmented images of unclothed female bodies. Some appear to come from soft-core pornography magazines, while others look like they have more artistic origins.

Jack Kerouac famously asserted that the term “beat” had this double connotation – that it signified both “down and out” and beatific. Allen Ginsburg’s “angelheaded hipsters” from the opening lines of Howl (1956) are perhaps the most famous example of “lionizing the lowly.” Such combinations did not prevent Beat poets and artists from essentializing the identities (such as that of the black “Jazz Man”) that they sought to elevate. Similarly, Berman’s use of pornographic tropes opens his work to the charge that it exploits and degrades women.

While the positions of DeFeo’s hands in the two images are similar enough to assume that the exposures were made in rapid succession, the slight differences between them are significant. In figure 11, her hands declaratively show, while in figure 19 they frame what we cannot see.

One could add DeFeo’s circular pendant (which she created) to this line of like forms. (She wears the necklace in figures 3, 4, and 6 – all of the photographs which represent her with her artwork. The medallion’s presence contributes to the mystical persona these images craft for DeFeo. Notably, the necklace is replaced by a long string of beads and tinsel in the “model” shots.) The photographs were taken before DeFeo restretched The Rose, an action which both made the painting bigger and shifted the convergence of rays to the center of the canvas. This shot is the only one that reveals the painting’s off-center composition. It is possible that the series prompted DeFeo’s decision to “center the center” by simulating that adjustment.

DeFeo always refuted later commentators’ assertions that she consciously designed The Rose to evoke vaginal imagery. For example, she expressed her objection to this reading in an undated note about her work for Henry Hopkins: “Just an additional note here, about subject matter from the women’s movement’s point of view. Although I recognize some reference to this kind of imagery in the finished work, I am no way motivated toward sexual
female body’s traditional role in the creative process: rather than serving as a model for her work, DeFeo could be viewed as directly generating it. By likening the artist’s bodily orifices to her painting’s radiating center, the photograph seems to strive towards a feminine version of expressionism, in which creative emanation is represented as giving birth rather than as ejaculating.\(^{363}\) However, her gesture of exposure is ultimately ambiguous: it represents her body as simultaneously generative (as giving “birth” to the radiating forms around her) and receptive (as holes to be penetrated).\(^{364}\) In any case, the fact that Berman and/or DeFeo chose not to print the negative indicates that they found its account of the woman artist or, more specifically, of the creative female body unsatisfactory.\(^{365}\) Their decision left the photographs and the identities they construct for DeFeo divided into two discrete sequences that reiterate the stereotypical gender roles of the studio – those of the male creator and the female model.

As noted in the introduction, there is evidence that DeFeo posed for painting classes at the California School of Fine Arts as early as the late 1950s.\(^{366}\) Although she appears to have
never posed nude at CSFA, her experiences there could have inspired the stool sequence. If this is the case, then the suite could amount to an inside joke about Bay Area Figuration, a style which relied heavily on life models and which had recently launched several members of the Fillmore circle (such as Joan Brown) to national prominence. Indeed, the model shots and *The Rose* shots could be read as personifications (even caricatures) of the dominant, often antagonistic styles practiced by the San Francisco avant-garde at the time – Bay Area Figuration and Abstract Expressionism.

The photographs ultimately escape attempts to tether them to any of the explanatory contexts rehearsed above. In the end, the most compelling and definitive characteristic of the pictures that represent DeFeo as a model is their elusiveness. The images’ recalcitrance manifests in their unplaceable tone, which shuttles between the parodic, the erotic, and the surreal, and which makes the sequence nearly impossible to pin down in relation to contemporary constructions of women artists – from the mainstream media’s essential refusal of that role in the late 1950s to proto-feminist attempts to reclaim a creative female body in the early 1960s. The murky quality of the prints gives formal expression to their mystery: the photographs’ veiled surfaces (which Berman produced by projecting the negatives through patterned transparencies during the developing process) contradict both their content (DeFeo’s exposure of her body) and their facture (Berman’s exposure of the film). While their subject matter conveys the viewer’s proximity to DeFeo’s body, their obscurity distances the viewer from her both perceptually and psychically. Each photograph’s scrim-like surface manifests the mediated nature of the image and thus counters the illusion of direct access to the model’s body, a pretense which underwrites pornography and most images of the artist’s model.367

One could argue that the darkroom effects transform the explicit shots from pornographic images into erotic ones.368 After all, the printing techniques obscure the details of DeFeo’s body, giving the representations a distant, aestheticized look. In most of the images she appears more nude than naked.369 That is, the play between revelation and concealment in the photographs could be seen to freeze the titillating dynamic of the peep show into a static image.370 I would argue, however, that this dialectic never fully resolves into the erotic. In the images where DeFeo reveals her body explicitly (even aggressively) through the printed veil, the contradictions between display and disguise, presence and absence, content and form remain pointed and perplexing.

---

367 Dennis rehearses the commonly-held view that pornographic images inspire a “physical breach of the presumed boundary between image and beholder” (1).

368 Dennis summarizes this distinction as follows: unlike pornographic images, erotic ones do not give rise to viewing experiences that violate “disinterested pleasure” (Ibid.). Thus, they fall within the category of the aesthetic as defined by Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In contradiction to the reading above, Berman’s distancing printing techniques could be seen to eroticize (if not to pathologize) the act of looking by spurring the viewer to lean in and carefully examine the image. In this regard, an analogy could be drawn between Berman’s “veiled” prints and Bruce Conner’s *RATBASTARDS*, which use nylon stockings to obscure the often-sordid contents of boxes and frames.

369 In its most basic definition, the nude is the naked female body transformed through art. For more on this distinction see Nead, “Part I: Theorizing the Female Nude,” 8-32.

370 In this reading, the tinsel becomes a boa of light that acts as both a surrogate for the viewer’s caress and a vehicle for titillation by creating the anticipation of exposure.
The Photographer as Chiromancer

Berman sent a postcard to DeFeo on the 14th of April 1959, most likely to set up the photo session that yielded the series (fig. 20). The card provides insight into Berman’s conception of the act of photographing his friend and, in doing so, helps make sense of the series’ many contradictions. The collaged postcard juxtaposes two seemingly unrelated images: a palmistry diagram and a self-portrait photograph. Berman printed the latter atop the former so that the index finger and the thumb of the splayed, schematically-rendered hand extend into the photograph, violating the otherwise abrupt and decisive border between them. The photograph displays Berman’s typical darkroom manipulations. Shadow practically blots out Berman’s body and the camera he holds at his waist. A dramatic splash of light illuminates his right eye, giving it a celestial glow.

The palm-reading image is an illustration from Amulets and Superstitions, a volume published in 1930 by the British Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge that catalogues talismans and other ritual objects from the Ancient Mediterranean and Middle East (fig. 22). In Budge’s text, the diagram illustrates a brief description of chiromancy as practiced by Kabbalists, a mystical sect of Judaism. The elliptical, cryptic note scrawled on the back of the card reads: “Am ready for shooting – let me know the rite day” (fig. 21). Berman’s substitution of “r-i-g-h-t” with its homonym “r-i-t-e” is significant and typical of Berman’s zeal for word play. There is a countercultural perversity to his toying with standards of communication (here, the postcard format and the English language). Indeed, the card’s palimpsest of postmarks registers bureaucratic disapproval or, at least, bewilderment at Berman’s attempt to carve out a creative space in the most mundane of missive forms.

Read together, the juxtaposed images suggest a palm reading scenario. With his camera obscured and his dramatically-illuminated right eye trained in the diagram’s direction,

---

371 The link between the postcard and the series is circumstantial but likely given the card’s date and message. My visual analysis of the card also supports their connection.
372 In Wallace Berman: Photographs (New York: D.A.P., 2007), Kristine McKenna claims that the self-portrait was taken in DeFeo’s apartment in 1959 (149). This attribution suggests that the series’ ten photographs were made over the course of two sessions instead of one, an idea which she explicitly states in the Semina Culture exhibition catalog (“Chronology,” 338). I have not yet ascertained the evidence that led McKenna to propose this timeline for the series’ production.
373 Like most of Berman’s works, the postcard is meticulously composed. Even his placement of the stamps incorporates them into the overall design: the arches at the top of the pair of two-cent stamps substitute for the tips of the pointer and pinky fingers, while the four-cent stamp at the palm’s base adds Abraham Lincoln’s institutionalized profile to the astrological symbols tattooing the palm. Here, the mystical freely and playfully mixes with the mundane.
374 A recently developed “straight” print of the same negative demonstrates just how much Berman’s techniques obscured the image.
375 E.A. Wallis Budge, Amulets and Superstitions: The original texts with translations and descriptions of a long series of Egyptian, Sumerian, Assyrian, Hebrew, Christian, Gnostic, and Muslim amulets and talismans and magical figures, with chapters on the evil eye, the origin of the amulet, the pentagon, the swástika, the cross (pagan and Christian), the properties of stones, rings, divination, numbers, the Kabbâlâh, ancient astrology, etc. (1930; reprint, Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003). Though I have no definitive evidence that Berman took the image directly from Budge, it seems a likely source. The volume’s occult subject matter and quaint mix of scientism and the supernatural would have appealed to Berman and many of his literary friends, such as Robert Duncan (who was a theosophist) and David Meltzer (who, like Berman, dabbled in Kabballah). Though more research needs to be done on the book’s circulation at the time, the fact that it was republished in 1961 indicates that it was popular.
376 This reading is just one of a number of relationships that the collage draws between the images. The stark juxtaposition of the two images highlights the difference in style and media between the schematic, woodblock print and the naturalistic photograph. With its dark outlines on a white background, the diagram inverts the photographs’
Berman assumes the role of chiromancer. The viewer’s gaze automatically shuttles between the white paper of the illustration and Berman’s brightly lit eye, establishing a connection between them. Like his photographs of DeFeo with *The Rose*, the collage elides Berman’s physical labor as a photographer (pressing the shutter) with the fortuneteller’s metaphysical labor (that of divination). By using an image of himself as a photographer to represent himself as a diviner, Berman analogized the two activities. The message on the back of the card reinforces this metaphor by playfully referring to their photo session as a ritual.

Furthermore, the palmistry diagram bears a notable resemblance to the photographs that Berman would soon take of DeFeo in front of *The Rose* (figs. 3 and 4). Her outstretched limbs echo the spread fingers, and the photograph’s edges tightly circumscribe her body (especially, in the back-facing shot) like the circular border around the hand. In both the print and the photographs, the combination of splayed figure and tight framing has a flattening, emblematizing effect on the represented bodies. Regimented within *The Rose*’s radial geometry and abstracted through high-contrast lighting, DeFeo’s body acquires a schematic cast (as previously discussed). In addition, the astrological symbols inscribed on the open palm predict Berman’s collaged “tattooing” of DeFeo’s chest with the Hebrew letter.

The postcard, I am arguing, offers a metaphorical account of the photo session that Berman sent the card to setup. The juxtaposed images stage, across the card, the confrontation, across the lens, between Berman and DeFeo. On the postcard, Berman re-imagines the photographic scenario as one of ritual divination in which he, aided by the camera-eye, is the “seer” and the composite form of DeFeo and her painting is the object of his esoteric interpretation. This reading casts the postcard itself as an instrument of divination – as a projection of the future events which Berman intended the missive to catalyze. What are we to make of Berman’s bizarre reimagining of the studio scenario? What significance did these mystical symbols and practices have in the Fillmore circle? Most importantly, what bearing does it have on the model of creativity the series figures and performs?

To begin, the analogy between photography and divination, between the camera’s eye and the seer’s supernatural gaze, is as old as photography itself. Chiromancy supposedly allows one to decipher the imperceptible (the interior, metaphysical, future, and cosmological) from the perceptible (the exterior, physical, present, and specific). Throughout its history, photography
has popularly been thought to possess the same ability. From its (highly problematic) use by physiognomists to lay bare the souls of criminals and madmen to its use by the surrealists to reveal the unconscious mind’s coding of our everyday experience, the camera’s “mechanical eye” has been positioned as a revealer of hidden forms and meanings.  

Berman was enamored with the surrealists, and his shots of DeFeo, as Rebecca Schoenthal has noted, bear many hallmarks of their photography: they distort and defamiliarize the nude, female body through framing and printing techniques.  

This conception of photography also accords with the mystical worldview held by many members of the Fillmore circle. Esotericism, as it is generally conceived, understands both sacred texts and things in the world symbolically: scripture and the objects of empirical experience are hints pointing to the true, hidden nature of creation. Though spiritual in origin, this cryptological account of the universe deeply informed Romantic strands of Modernism; the symbolists and the surrealists, for example, who attempted to counter the deadening rationality of modern life by re-infusing it with a beyond. Berman was heir to this tradition, as were most of the Beat poets. The renegade surrealists Jean Cocteau and Antonin Artaud were two of his cultural heroes. When he wrote DeFeo’s postcard, Berman probably had Artaud’s esoteric definition of ritual in mind. Grove Press had recently published the first English translation of Artaud’s The Theater and its Double (in which he defines ritual as a performative means violently to transcend bodily experience), and it was making a big splash in American avant-garde circles, including the Fillmore.  

Like many of his friends, Berman also dabbled directly in esoteric traditions, such as tarot and Kabbalism. The latter was especially foundational to Berman’s art practice. Not only did he feature Hebrew letters in his artworks, but the kabbalistic idea that the world is a text open to the interpreter’s revealing rearrangements formed the conceptual basis for his Verifax collages of the 1960s and 70s, which use a gridded framework of hand-held, transistor radios to draw connections between seemingly random fragments of the image continuum (fig. 23).  

Photography was but one of the tools that Berman and other members of the Fillmore circle used to uncover hidden levels of experience. The most notorious was psychotropic drugs, such as marijuana, peyote, and heroin. A snapshot by Patricia Jordan of Berman wearing peyote button “glasses” encapsulates the idea that drugs induce an altered vision of the world (fig. 24). Many contemporary literary works by Berman’s companions made the same claims through ecstatic verse. For example, Michael McClure’s “Peyote Poem” (which Berman published as

---

379 Schoenthal, 292-93. The extent of Berman’s exposure to surrealist photography is difficult to determine. It is likely that he adapted the aesthetic primarily from surrealist film, which he loved (Tosh Berman, “Wallace and His Film,” Wallace Berman: Support the Revolution (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1992), 73-77.)
380 Artaud’s image, name, and words regularly appeared in issues of Semina in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Other evidence of the poet’s currency within the Fillmore circle includes Michael McClure’s journals (Michael McClure Papers, Bancroft Library) and later masque-like plays, such as The Beard (1965), and Philip Lamantia’s inclusion of a translation of Artaud’s diatribe “I Demand Extinction of Laws Prohibiting Narcotic Drugs!” in his anthology Narcotica (1959), which Berman illustrated. It is very possible that Artaud’s conception of theater as ritual helped crystallize Berman’s similar conception of photography.
Semina 3 in 1958) chronicled and celebrated the poet’s first time taking peyote, emphasizing his revelation that the everyday world is intimately connected to the cosmos. Philip Lamantia’s 1959 anthology Narcotica similarly analogized pharmaceutical and religious experience. The photographs Berman took for the first edition illustrate Lamantia’s conflation of Catholic transcendence and the effects of heroin by depicting the author shooting up before a cross. In an undated note to DeFeo, Berman suggested that the photograph of her facing The Rose induced similar mind-expanding effects: “having a universal trip of yr [sic] body in relation to ‘rose,’” he wrote. By choosing drug lingo (i.e., the term “trip”) to characterize his viewing experience, Berman attributed to the photograph the psychedelic effects of a narcotic.

Significantly, the esoteric worldview also offers a model of meaning production that speaks to Berman and DeFeo’s curious photo series. Esotericism sees nature as so many hints divulging God’s secrets to a select few, but hints are inherently unstable communicators. In other words, the belief that the world is encrypted has two main hermeneutic effects: it restricts understanding to a small group of initiates, and it ambiguates the link between signifier and signified. Therefore, as the Jewish philosopher Moshe Halbertal explains, “The addition of an esoteric level expands the text’s ‘receptive capacity to meaning’ to almost infinite dimensions. What can be read into it becomes far more varied and extreme.” Esoteric traditions such as Kabbalism thus encourage their exegetes to propose radical interpretations to sacred texts, creating the paradox that the “most guarded [knowledge] is the most open ended.”

As is not the case with deconstruction, however, esotericism’s radical opening of the text and empowerment of the reader do not spell the “death of the author.” For it is precisely the author’s (that is, God’s) infinity that creates the text’s infinite capacity to mean. Within the Kabbalah’s mystical logic, “indeterminacy” proceeds from the “absolute” without contradiction. Esotericism, in short, posits a relationship between author, text, and reader that defies earthbound models of meaning production. It combines the seemingly mutually-exclusive models of meaning making proposed by modernism and postmodernism: its empowerment of the

383 Berman’s illustrations for Narcotica are another obvious example of the characteristic Beat strategy of subverting norms by “lionizing the lowly.” Perhaps that is why Paul O’Neil discussed the photographs in “The Only Rebellion Around,” his derisive Life magazine article about the Beats from November 30, 1959.
384 Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The full note, written with Berman’s characteristically idiosyncratic grammar and punctuation, reads: yes you can use photos these are only prints existing & no negatives i think the one of you facing WhiteRose stretching out would be the coolest for reproduction having a universal trip of yr body in relation to ‘rose’ lighting seems also cool for reproduction
The note may refer to the Focus Gallery’s “A Kind of Beatness” show. In DeFeo’s 1978 correspondence with her lawyer, she claims that this exhibition was the only context in which she permitted the photographs to be shown publically.
386 Ibid., 151.
387 Halbertal, 161. The idea that scripture is “inexhaustible,” open to “an infinite number of valid interpretations,” is foundational to Kabbalism (Moshe Idel, Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 110-11).
389 Ibid.
reader’s infinite interpretive capacity resembles postmodernist reception theory, while its preservation of absolute authorial intent echoes modernist values. Rabbinical scholar Moshe Idel articulates this tension: “Paradoxically, the kabbalistic identification of text and author and the infinity acquired by the text make it possible to extract from the text an infinity of meanings, a process that creates a strong reader.”

Kabbalism, in sum, necessitates both a strong author and a strong reader, while avoiding the violence of both the author’s totalitarian control and his death.

Esotericism also makes meaning unplaceable by provocatively confusing the superimposed and the revealed. As Harold Bloom explains, Kabbalism requires the interpreter to take a “double stance: on the one hand, he will insert or super-impose depths of meanings into the narrative line of the text; on the other hand, he will claim to bring them to the surface.” The initiate’s activity thus blurs reception and creation: it is “simultaneously interpretive and visionary,” and the product it yields is a hybrid “between text and commentary.”

The postcard suggests that, for Berman, photographing DeFeo was akin to an act of esoteric interpretation. Indeed, viewing the series through the Kabbalah’s mystical hermeneutics helps square the contradictions of authorship that it both figures and performs. According to esotericism, DeFeo could be simultaneously the revered source of all meaning and an object of interpretation, a catalyst for the creative processes of others. She could be, in other words, both Godhead and model. As simultaneously generative and receptive, DeFeo’s female form embodied this paradox (as the unprinted negative asserts). Likewise, in Kabbalism creation both issues from a single creator in an instantaneous act of divine emanation, and accrues over generations of interpretation. In this way, it marries the contrasting models of artistic production depicted in the photo series — the creation ex nihilo staged in The Rose shots and the representational procedures implied by the model sequence. In both esotericism and the photographs, creation is simultaneously autonomous and relational; it is both an individual act and one that occurs through encounter, appropriation, and interpretation.

In addition, the curious play that Berman’s obscuring printing techniques produce between exposure (of DeFeo’s body, the studio sanctuary, and the film) and concealment also structures esoteric inquiry. Because of its encrypted nature, the object of the mystic’s study simultaneously reveals and veils God. Many kabbalistic commentaries acknowledge the erotic relationship that this dialectic establishes between text and initiate. As Halbertal observes, “the deeper layers of Torah [are understood] as God’s own body uncovered in the interpretative act. The multilayered text that both reveals and conceals is conceived in terms of the erotic subtle movement of intimacy and alienation.” Berman’s photographs of DeFeo manifest this metaphor pictorially. Like God seen through the veil of text, she appears through the veiled

---

390 Idel, *Old Worlds*, 182.
391 Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 30. Rotjman describes this phenomenon slightly differently: as she puts it, esoteric exegesis seeks to discover “undeciphered, radically new meaning, whose reading was nevertheless already included in the word revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai” (*Black Fire*, 1-2).
393 According to Halbertal, “the tension between concealment and disclosure” is “intrinsic to the esoteric idea” (5).
394 Halbertal, 146. In this statement, Halbertal refers specifically to *The Zohar*, a group of Aramaic texts foundational to Kabbalism.
By highlighting the print’s mediated nature and giving the images a spectral quality, Berman’s unconventional printing techniques foreground the loss that underwrites photographic representation in general. The images thus emphasize the poignant play between absence and presence that characterizes both photography and esoteric hermeneutics.

Viewing the series through the lens of esotericism does not completely resolve the conflicting artistic identities DeFeo occupies in the series, but it does help those contradictions to “speak.” It allows, that is, the photographs’ defining peculiarities to mean. Specifically, the framework of esotericism enables the series’ contradictions to articulate a model of making that bridges autonomous creation and collective production. Berman, I believe, saw esoteric exegesis as a template for his communal art practice, and he attempted to enact that ideal through his photographic collaboration with DeFeo.

By highlighting the print’s mediated nature and giving the images a spectral quality, Berman’s unconventional printing techniques foreground the loss that underwrites photographic representation in general. The images thus emphasize the poignant play between absence and presence that characterizes both photography and esoteric hermeneutics.

Berman’s journal *Semina* demonstrates that many of the collaborations he fostered were characterized by esotericism’s defining contradictions (fig. 25). To produce an issue, he collected poems, drawings, and photographs from his friends (those who lived both near and far), reprinted them on a variety of small cards, gathered these “pages” into envelopes or folders, and mailed them back to his friends. Unlike a page bound to a spine, each card retains its physical identity as a discrete work; they coalesce to produce a whole that is tenuous at best.

Esoteric traditions offered robust models for collaboration in the Fillmore community, in which artists maintained separate studios and made their own works but were also in frequent (in many cases, daily) contact – viewing one another’s works in their studios and neighborhood galleries. Mystical hermeneutics similarly embeds the independent creator within an interpretative community. I am convinced that Berman recognized (and no doubt relished) the similarity between Kabbalism and the Fillmore circle’s informal, appropriative practices. Both blurred creation and reception, making meaning provocatively unplaceable and confounding traditional definitions of authorship. Both produced liminal objects that were simultaneously independent works and interpretations of others. Berman and DeFeo’s photo series exemplifies these ambiguities.

Berman’s journal *Semina* demonstrates that many of the collaborations he fostered were characterized by esotericism’s defining contradictions (fig. 25). To produce an issue, he collected poems, drawings, and photographs from his friends (those who lived both near and far), reprinted them on a variety of small cards, gathered these “pages” into envelopes or folders, and mailed them back to his friends. Unlike a page bound to a spine, each card retains its physical identity as a discrete work; they coalesce to produce a whole that is tenuous at best.

*Semina*’s loose-leaf structure instantiates the independence of each author and act, reflecting both the dispersed nature of the publication’s production and the loose-knit community it represents. While the magazine’s unboundedness safeguards authorial supremacy by segregating each work, the format also has the opposite effect: it fosters a strong reader. The issues’ sturdy, palm-sized “pages” invite readers to rearrange them into sequences or constellations – to discover their own, idiosyncratic correspondences through study or chance.

Commentators frequently note the similarities between an issue of *Semina* and a deck of Tarot cards. Kabbalists are often described as monteurs: “Provided that the integrity of this vast puzzle represented by the hermeneutic
each reader contributes to the magazine’s form and meaning; reception continues the production process, muddying authorship. Semina, in sum, does more than temper the high-Romantic model of the cloistered artist: like esoteric hermeneutics, it enacts a complex relationship between individual and collective authorship. The dialectic it performs between the autonomous act and communal production is generative, just as the Kabbalah’s preservation of God’s authority is the basis of the exegete’s inexhaustible interpretive powers.

The photo series depicts The Rose as a similarly generative work. By portraying the painting as an occult symbol, the photographs imply two things about its reception. First, they signal that only initiates – the Fillmore circle – will be able to fully comprehend it. Second, they suggest that the painting will serve as a catalyst for creativity in that circle, since hermetic signs require interpretation. By framing the painting as a symbol to be decoded, in short, the photographs opened it to further appropriation by DeFeo and Berman’s community. In this way, the series (like Semina) potentially catalyzed a chain of intertextual collaborations.

The Rose photographs not only mimic hermetic symbols, they (and the rest of the suite) also performed one of the primary functions of occult cultural production: they forged subcultural identity. By encrypting texts and restricting their circulation, kabbalists transform the activity of interpretation into an affirmation of the exegete’s membership to their exclusive group. Berman treated both Semina and the photo series as esoteric objects by tightly circumscribing their audiences. Moreover, the photographs’ revealing content (which would have scandalized the general public) reinforced the privileged intimacy of the invitees who viewed them in Berman’s apartment. In this way, the act of viewing the series marked the beholder as part of DeFeo and Berman’s inner circle, bringing into being a kind of order of The Rose that demarcated and reinforced existing community ties. At the same time, however, the

material and composed of forms of language and forms of thought is guaranteed, the exegete who controls its arrangement is allowed to choose among the infinite number of possible ways of constructing it” (Rojtman, 4). For a more detailed discussion of the participatory viewership the magazine solicits, see Fredman, 104. The fact that Berman titled his journal Semina (which is Latin for “to sow or inseminate”) suggests that he saw the cyclical relationship that the journal catalyzed between reception and production as generative. Perhaps he hoped that the relatively minor creative decisions readers make about the journal’s sequence and form would inspire new works. The publication’s loose-leaf format also allowed artists to physically incorporate “pages” into their works or their studio spaces. As discussed in footnote 16, DeFeo’s drawing The Eyes references a poem by Lamantia which was published in Semina 4. Berman may have featured this work in the series because it exemplified the cross-fertilizations he wanted to cultivate through Semina.

Because its recipients were so dispersed, the magazine exaggerated the dance between distance and contact, separation and connection that characterized creative relationships in the Fillmore circle. Here, the word “painting” refers to The Rose as both an object and a process. The latter definition of “painting” accounts for DeFeo’s presence in the photographs. As painting The Rose dragged on, her creative activity added significantly to the painting’s mystique (as discussed below).

This point crystallizes the fundamental difference between Berg’s reading of the series in relation to the Kabbalah and my own. His iconographic interpretation uses kabbalistic symbolism to fix the meaning of the photographs and The Rose, while I contend that Berman and DeFeo evoked such symbolism to unfix meaning – to open up the painting to infinite interpretations.

Semina also reflected back an image of Berman’s dispersed community to itself. The reciprocal nature of the magazine’s production and reception – that its creators were also its audience – meant that it enacted the ever-shifting boundaries of Berman’s coterie. McClure describes the journal’s power to generate social cohesion as follows: “Seminas are a form of love structure that Wallace made, drawing friends together. Friends are drawn together into the assemblage of the magazine, but the magazine is also sent to acquaintances who are drawn into the circle of friends, so it expands and becomes a larger event” (“On Semina,” 60). Because of its private distribution, the act of receiving Semina marked one as a member of Berman’s subcultural circle. The mobile magazine thus
photographs’ play of revelation and concealment (like Semina’s autonomous pages) signaled that separation was crucial to the kind of belonging the Fillmore circle enacted. The dance of intimacy and alienation that the images stage between the viewer and DeFeo mimicked the circle’s loose collectivity – its dialectic between the isolation of the studio and the fraternity of the neighborhood, between individual and communal authorship.

Two poetic tributes to The Rose, written separately by McClure and Martin near the end of DeFeo’s epic process, suggest that members of the Fillmore circle often framed the painting in esoteric terms. McClure’s poem underscores the work’s generative power by treating it as an object of meditation:

WHITE ROSE is breeze, is curl, is stretch, is breath, is chair,
is lips, is gentle, is sweet, is tongue-tip, is blond, is moving, is powder, is heel, is anger, is brow, is drip,
is grace, is plump, is soft, is petal, is pollen, is black,
is velvet, is snail, is languor, is smoke, is mount, is cloud,
is blue, is pout, is stroke, is strike, is sleep, is envy,
is increase?, is caress, is bubble, is deep, is thigh, is lisp,
is silver, is sweat, is smile, is white, is shine, is ankle, is furnace, is fur, is touch, is cameo, is rage,
is pale, is musk, is red, is profile, is toe, is damp,
is pin, is hook, is wish, is high, is hips, is catch, is dark,
is moist, is pearl, is flowing, is venom
White Rose is tongue-tip furnace pollen of Jay DeFeo’s muscle tone. – MM

The poem’s repetitive structure (i.e., comma + is + a word) gives it the feeling of a mantra or litany. Its chant-like rhythm identifies the mandalic painting as a vehicle for mantric release, as a means of discovering the celestial through material form. Like Berman and DeFeo’s photographs, then, McClure’s poem represents The Rose as a site of mystic ritual.

When the poem is recited, the repeated “is” develops a sonic insistence that gives McClure’s seemingly poetic mobilization of the verb “to be” the force of reality: it transforms analogy into ontological naming. While the reiterative “is” seeks to anchor meaning, however, the stream of disparate nouns, verbs, and adjectives seeks to defer it. This combination creates the impression that “WHITE ROSE” is driving the poet/devotee’s frenetic invention through a process that falls somewhere between divine inspiration and a game of word association.

reinforced and generated belonging. In this way, Berman’s extended, underground community fit Michael Warner’s definition of a counter-public – a group of individuals bound together, in opposition to the mainstream, through the circulation of texts (Publics and Counterpublics (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2002)).

405 “White Rose, Muscle-Tone Breath Pearl April Venom Musk Cameo Calves Caress Rage Ankle Musk Snail Breeze Heel,” “Beat Culture” File, The Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York. The poem’s date is uncertain, but McClure likely wrote it at DeFeo’s request for publication in the brochure accompanying The Rose’s debut exhibition. In 1965, DeFeo sent Hopps (who was organizing the work’s unveiling at The Pasadena Art Museum) a letter informing him that she, Martin, and McClure were writing “brief statements” for the pamphlet (DeFeo, letter to Walter Hopps, May 10, 1965, Archives of the Norton Simon Museum). None of the three texts written in 1965 was used for the flier that accompanied the exhibition when it finally opened in 1969. Instead, it contained a second text written by Martin (discussed below). It is notable that DeFeo asked Martin and McClure to reprise the roles they played for her “Sixteen Americans” catalog entry, at the painting’s promising beginning. 406 Only the final line breaks the poem’s trance-like rhythm, which is furthered by the brevity of McClure’s word choices.

407 The poem’s stream-of-consciousness style is characteristic of Beat poetry. However, the repetitive “is” anchors the list of words back to the painting and thus prevents the poem from reading like pure authorial projection.
While the poem’s structural tension between repetition and permutation positions the painting as a powerful creative catalyst, it also represents the work as mutable and prone to appropriation. In other words, the poem mimics the strain in esoteric hermeneutics between inherent and imposed meaning, between the monolithic author and the infinitely-interpretable text.  

Martin’s ode also brands The Rose as occult, but it does so to stress the work’s privacy. The short text was published in the brochure that accompanied the painting’s debut exhibition. Like Martin’s contribution to DeFeo’s “Sixteen Americans” catalog entry a decade earlier, the piece is larded with metaphor:

There was a notion, common in that age, that it was a flower which knew the secret; and it was known among the initiates that Jay was that flower. Her eyes had seen the wings of angels; in the dark crevasse of highest mountains had lain her woman’s sign; and then, in the penultimate year, had begun to burn the nova star of the bindu point, the shining rays of the center of her head.

. . . .

Time came and the ultimate year. The flower of the initiates was ravished into public spectacle, sales item, prestige pitch. (The flower was two: the death rose of an angel’s brain, and a dreaming girl.) Time passed, the carousel sweep missed the silver ring (now ivory and white, waning), a diamond-petal in a period of zircons. The rose aged on an abandoned strand; and the girl, lost and numbed among doors closing and the rush of moving planes, was forlorn. . . .

The passage conflates DeFeo and her painting (“Jay was that flower”) and describes this amalgam as a keeper of “secret” knowledge for “initiates.” Martin’s conception of The Rose as an esoteric entity belonging to the Fillmore community helps to account for both the ode’s riddle-like prose and its solemn tone, which is decidedly strange for a premiere. In a 2009 interview, Martin confessed that he made the text intentionally cryptic, that he loaded it with insider references that only those close to DeFeo could understand. In effect, he converted the exhibition brochure into a hermetic commentary. The passage’s convoluted language not only evidences Martin’s proclivity for flowery prose, then, but also his desire to reserve The Rose for the Fillmore circle, even at its public unveiling. In the final paragraph, Martin makes his hostility towards the exhibition more overt, writing: “The flower of the initiates was ravished into public spectacle, sales item, prestige pitch.” He equates making the painting public with soiling a sacred object.

---

408 Throughout its long production process, The Rose set in motion a similar play between constancy (the singularity of the support and center) and permutation (its layered accumulation of changing radial compositions). This tension is one of the work’s most perplexing and original qualities.


410 Ibid.

411 In my interview with Martin at his home in Piedmont, California on May 6, 2009, he confirmed this interpretation of the line “Jay was that flower”: “Well anyway, that refers to the painting being Jay and Jay being the painting.” This statement resonates with the visual conflation of DeFeo and her painting in the 1959 series, as does the line, “shining rays of the center of her head.”

412 “I was thinking when I was making them afterwards, ‘no one will know what this is about.’ . . . Because there is a context for it . . . See, there are all these little inside things . . . little groupy thing[s]” (Martin, interview with the author, 2009).

413 In this way, Martin’s statement is an example of “instrumental esotericism,” a text which is encrypted to reserve its content for a select few despite its wide circulation (Halbertal, 149).

414 In his 2009 interview with me, Martin stated that he felt DeFeo had been exploited by the way The Ferus Gallery and the Pasadena Art Museum had handled her painting. He encrypted his brochure entry, in part, to express his discontent covertly: “I remember at the time, getting some bemused – ‘what’s that about?’ reactions. See I also wrote it that way because I was actually very angry about the way I thought Jay had been exploited. But if I made it
It is impossible to determine how much Berman and DeFeo’s 1959 series influenced their friends’ later representations of The Rose. Perhaps their photographs invented the painting’s occult identity, or perhaps they simply reflected an account of the work that was already pervasive in the Fillmore community. Either way, Martin’s bitter ode demonstrates that by the mid-1960s the painting’s long production process was seen to confirm its esoteric nature. This fact is not surprising given that the eight years DeFeo spent making The Rose at 2322 Fillmore had largely reserved it for a private audience. Moreover, her cyclical, seemingly-perpetual process played into stereotypes of the bohemian artist sacrificing worldly gain in an irrational/principled exercise of art for arts’ sake.\textsuperscript{415} At the end of his piece, Martin casts DeFeo as the tragic, Romantic artist. Like Balzac’s Frenhofer, the exposure of her masterpiece leaves her “lost,” “numbed,” and “forlorn.”

In Martin’s description, The Rose occupies an “ambiguous ontological position” between “the privileged and the vanishing,” a paradoxical state which Halbertal argues defines esoteric knowledge.\textsuperscript{416} He explains: “The hidden sphere allows a great degree of freedom, being unrestricted by constraints and friction of the outside rigid world. . . . Yet such space and freedom is purchased at the price of the ethereal nature of the esoteric and its marginality.”\textsuperscript{417}

There is evidence that Berman viewed his artistic activity in similar terms. He often used the phrase “swinging in the shadows” to poetically describe his cultural practice.\textsuperscript{418} “Swinging” conjures an image of unrestricted movement, while “shadows” evokes obscurity.\textsuperscript{419} The phrase thus indicates that Berman saw his creative work as enacting the values of esotericism—specifically, the mix of freedom and marginality which The Rose was thought to exemplify.

**Correspondence**

A photographic self-portrait taken by Berman in 1960 figures the type of community he hoped this “esoteric-inspired” collaboration would construct (fig. 26). The shot depicts a display of Berman’s photographs arranged in his Scott Street apartment. The arrangement may resemble his exhibit of DeFeo’s suite, given its similarity in time and location. A handful of small-sized prints, of varying dimensions, cluster haphazardly on the wall and are crookedly propped atop a line of books that snakes along the bottom of the frame. The hanging photographs each depict a friend of Berman’s and were taken in the Bay Area the previous year, contemporary with the DeFeo series.\textsuperscript{420} An oval mirror reflecting Berman’s bearded visage crowns the arrangement.

\begin{flushright}
obscure enough, instead of naming names that I thought they robbed her. They hadn’t really. But I felt she had . . . [been misused] that was my feeling. And so I wrote it like that so I could say what I thought and no one would know it.”
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{415} The 1959 photographs may have been a self-fulfilling prophecy; they may, that is, have encouraged DeFeo’s extended production process by framing her creativity in esoteric terms.

\textsuperscript{416} Halbertal, 157.

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{418} Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of The Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1990), xi.

\textsuperscript{419} The word “shadows” probably held an Artaudian connotation for Berman as well. In *The Theater and Its Double*, shadows are a prominent metaphor for our flitting, spiritual doubles. Thus, Berman may have used the phrase “swinging in the shadows” to liken the marginal space of his subculture to the hidden, higher plane of existence posited in esoteric thought.

\textsuperscript{420} I have been able to identify all but four prints hanging on the wall from reproductions in *Wallace Berman: Photographs*. The display includes photographs of John Wieners in his Scott Street apartment, Jan Balas with Joe Dunne and Wieners in San Francisco, Balas in San Francisco, Howard Shulman in Berman’s Scott Street, and Richard Constantino at his home in Beverly Glen (which is the only shot not taken in the Bay Area). Most of those
like a head on a body. The blurry and miniaturized quality of the reflection assimilates it with the surrounding images, while the mirror’s scale, roundness, and apex position distinguish his likeness from the rest. Berman raises his arms – palms open, thumbs touching – in a deliberate but enigmatic gesture. His pose makes the viewer question how he took the photograph, augmenting the photograph’s mystery.

The photograph crafts a specific understanding of community. The self-portrait represents a strange marriage between photography and montage. More “readymade collage” than photomontage, the shot generates a distinctive, perceptual strain between unity and multiplicity, similar to that created by Semina’s loose-leaf format. The photograph’s smooth surface prompts the viewer to perceive it as a cohesive scene, while the discrete images jostling within the photograph’s frame invite the viewer to trace the play of similarity and difference between them – a relational mode of looking normally reserved for composite representations. The image, in short, stages a collective that is characterized by an irresolvable tension between whole and part, group and individual, belonging and difference. In this way, it fits Jean-Luc Nancy’s definition of an inoperative community, which “resists every transcendence that tries to absorb it, be it an All or an Individual” in favor of “belonging in difference.”

According to Nancy, community exists in the liminal space between “interdependency and independence,” “dependency and autonomy,” and “intimacy and estrangement.” The uneasy pull between the unifying frame of Berman’s photograph and the discrete images it contains mimics this liminality, as does the play of revelation and concealment in his photographs of DeFeo.

The self-portrait evidences another important context for the 1959 series – Berman’s larger photographic project. It suggests that the shots of DeFeo were broadly typical of Berman’s production in terms of both subject and use. Indeed, he photographed intimates who belonged to the cast of bohemian artists and writers who rotated through the old Victorian on Scott Street where Berman lived with his family from 1958 to 1960. The house was just off of Alamo Square, about a mile south of 2322 Fillmore Street, and represented another hub of underground creative activity in the Western Addition. The larger prints propped on the books do not all appear to have been taken by Berman. Semina Culture identifies the far-right image as an altered film still of Susan Hayward depicting Barbara Graham in I Want to Live from 1958 (63). Berman later used it as the cover of Semina 7 (1961).

Moreover, the portraits’ irregular arrangement and the ample wall space around them give the display an improvised, temporary character that counters the photograph’s static perpetuity. The composition suggests that Berman’s domestic exhibit, and thus his community, will change and expand. In this way, the photograph performs a coming into collective being that is fluid, contingent, and provisional. For Nancy, the liminality and contingency of the inoperative community inoculated it against the social diseases that plague authoritarianism (oppressing the individual in the name of the collective) and liberalism (sacrificing the greater good in the name of individual autonomy).

Upon moving to San Francisco in 1957, Berman ceased building the tableau-like assemblages that had dominated his show at the Ferus Gallery, and focused instead on photography and Semina. There are several potential reasons for this shift. Due to the relative compactness and mobility of their production, the print-based media he turned to were better suited to the cramped, urban environment. They also allowed Berman more control over the reception of his art. Unlike three-dimensional works, neither his photographs nor issues of Semina required a physical site for display. The ability to hand-pick the audience for his art was probably crucial to Berman at the time given his recent conviction on obscenity charges. While much has been written about the confluence of art and community in Semina, Berman’s photography remains underexplored.

Some aspects of the series, however, stand out from the rest of Berman’s oeuvre. He rarely grouped his photographs into series, for example. The fact that Berman only circulated his prints privately distinguishes his
almost exclusively and only showed his prints privately, in constantly-rearranged vignettes in his home and sent as postcards. The Scott Street image also implies that Berman used photography to experiment with the relationship between making art and making community, a purpose which accords with my reading of DeFeo’s suite. The domestic display captured in the shot appears to represent Berman’s underground community and his position in it. The fact that he displayed this arrangement and others like it in his home, where his family and friends were apt to see them, suggests that he wanted his photographs to function as Semina did – like a mirror reflecting back to viewers an image of their social and cultural connectedness. Berman models this self-reflexive viewing dynamic in his self-portrait, which literalizes the equation between photograph and mirror. He also gave his prints social agency by mailing them. His postcards enacted the relationships illustrated (or imagined) by the constellations of prints hanging in his apartment. The missives performed the simultaneous pull between connection and separation figured in his montages by bridging the physical and social distance between sender and recipient even as they codified it.

The DeFeo series suggests that Berman saw this type of community, and the style of collaboration that fostered it, as a way of preserving individual authorial freedom without the isolationism of abstract-expressionist autonomy. The photographs indicate that esotericism offered a way for Berman to frame his belief that appropriation is an act of reverence, not a violent dispossession. The generous, reciprocal relationship it posits between individual and collective production embodied his ideal vision of art practice in the Fillmore circle and his larger underground network of artists and writers. Kabbalism provided a framework in which the ambiguities of authorship that arose from collaborations like his photo shoot with DeFeo could be a source of pleasure rather than anxiety. The 1959 series is, in essence, a manifesto of this ideal.

However, the Scott Street self-portrait also suggests that Berman recognized that the unconventional collaborations he engaged in could be interpreted in ways that went against his ideals. As noted above, the photograph establishes a relationship between Berman and the pictorially-assembled community before him that is provocatively equivocal. Does he lift his arms like a worshiper venerating his idol or like a maestro conducting his orchestra? The action makes his figure seem precarious and liminal, as if he were about to swan dive out of the mirror’s frame. However, it also reads as an assertion of presence: he appears to stretch up in order to join the virtual gathering via photography staged before him – his physical effort registering a desire to belong or perhaps to claim; the zigzag of his abutting hands could be interpreted as a ‘W’ for ‘Wallace.’ On the one hand, then, his gesture could be read as reclining and reverential – an interpretation which accords with his view that manipulating his friends’ works to make pieces like Semina and his photographs of The Rose enacted respect and practice from later photographers, such as Nan Goldin and Larry Clark, who also made their subcultural communities the subject of their work.

426 Berman usually deployed his postcards in the context of specific interpersonal situations. That is, he circulated them in relation to face-to-face interactions; they were often thank you notes for past visits, invitations for future ones, and even testaments to hoped-for meetings that never occurred. Usually, they featured a photo of either Berman or the recipient.

427 Both Berman’s montages and his postcards operate on the principle of correspondence or drawing connections between discrete entities. His Verifax collages allude to the esoteric iteration of this principle – the idea that things in the world “correspond” to entities in the spiritual plane.
generosity. On the other hand, his gesture could be read as an expression of ownership or control, suggesting that his appropriative practices amount to domination. Berman, ever the trickster, left the image open to both contradictory meanings.

Some aspects of the 1959 photo series, I think, also acknowledge the tensions and challenges that necessarily arose when Berman applied Kabbalism’s otherworldly model of production to his flesh and blood community. They hint, that is, at the ways in which personality, ego, difference, and power made enacting the esoteric ideal in an interpersonal context a messy affair. The most telling photograph in this regard is the one in which Berman appears with DeFeo (fig. 12). His mock shock could simply be poking fun at the postwar public’s prudishness, but the expression also seems self-conscious. Berman, I am convinced, wanted his collaboration with DeFeo to make the artist-model relationship truly intersubjective by playing up the unplaceability of meaning inherent to it. The pair’s caricature of the objectifying artist-model dynamic conveys their desire to transcend it. At the same time, however, the caricature admits to the similarities between their working relationship and the stereotype they perform. In this way, the image acknowledges that, in photographing DeFeo, in using her body and works as the basis for his art, he risked alienating and even exploiting her.

The context in which DeFeo made the comments on the series quoted at the beginning of this chapter evidences the risks she ran in collaborating with Berman. Her reflections derive from correspondence regarding her 1978 lawsuit against Artforum over their unauthorized publication of figure 10 in an article about Berman, who had died two years before. The suit (which charged the magazine with “libel” and “invasion of privacy”) demonstrates that the photographs’ ambiguous authorship became a problem for DeFeo when they were unexpectedly made public, because it effectively meant that she was no longer in control of her professional image. As she explained to her lawyer and the magazine, the private context in which the series was originally shown tempered this alienation because the audience’s intimate

428 Berman used the figure of the transistor radio to represent this authorial ideal (i.e., the artist as medium transmitting the works of others) in his Verifax collages.

429 Conner’s recollection of the DeFeo series’ original exhibition describes Berman’s intentional evasiveness concerning identity and authorship: “Yeah, and I went over there and of course here were all these pictures that are so well known now. And another photo which I’ve been told doesn’t – Well, nobody knows about it which it was a picture of Wallace next to Jay. Wallace, you know, fully clothed and Jay next to him totally naked standing there in front of the camera! And that one’s disappeared. If it survived it may be something that surely got rid of or maybe somebody stole or something like that. But I remember Wallace was very obtuse and he would, you know, he usually did not answer direct questions directly, or be assertive. He would say things which gave you an impression that he might be talking about possibly one of three different things and so he had these photos and he was talking or something and I said ‘Oh, you’ve got these photos on the wall here in the living room of Jay and her painting.’ He said ‘I sure hope Wally doesn’t show up.’ And you know, Wally Hedrick, but Wallace Berman then was known as Wally. I thought this could mean either you know here’s this one man show and [sic] ‘I hope Wally doesn’t show up’ who’s the ego behind the whole thing” (quoted in Schoenthal, 290-91).

430 In The Pornography of Representation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), Susanne Kappeler articulates the feminist argument that the artist-model relationship stymies reciprocity and intersubjectivity (qualities fostered by esoteric hermeneutics).

431 The photograph was reproduced in Merril Greene, “Portrait of the Artist as an Underground Man,” Artforum, February 1978, 53-81. Following the advice of her dealer, Paule Anglim, and Henry Hopkins, director of the San Francisco Art Museum, DeFeo decided to drop the suit (Jay DeFeo, letter to Mark Himelstein, August 31, 1978, The Jay DeFeo Trust), and it was eventually settled out of court (Mark Himelstein, letter to Jay DeFeo, February 6, 1979, The Jay DeFeo Trust).

432 Mark Himelstein of Himelstein and Savinar Attorneys at Law, San Francisco, letter to Artforum, March 30, 1978, The Jay DeFeo Trust. DeFeo was especially afraid that Artforum’s publication of the risqué photograph would jeopardize her teaching position at California State University Sonoma.
knowledge of Berman and DeFeo minimized the risk that they would misunderstand the works.\footnote{433} The feelings of “shame, mortification, and humiliation” that she claimed to have experienced upon seeing herself naked in *Artforum* indicate that the exposure ideally experienced as intimacy within the Fillmore circle was experienced as violation outside of it.\footnote{434}

While DeFeo’s reaction to the photograph’s publication demonstrates the dangers of her partnership with Berman, it also reveals her deep understanding of the beauty of their alliance. The above-quoted passage in which she describes herself as a model crystallizes this complexity:

> I am not entirely happy with Wallace’s portraits, but seldom have models been altogether happy with artists’ conceptions of them. I did not feel it was appropriate to intervene and edit Wallace’s ‘series portrait’ as it was his vision, his interpretation . . . My consent to all this was out of respect to Wallace as an artist, and I wanted him to have his portrait as he saw it. I was the model only and not the artist in this situation. He, in turn, demonstrated his gratitude for this freedom of expression by protecting me from public scrutiny and misrepresentation. For this reason the only early showing was one for friends of us both by invitation only.\footnote{435} [Emphasis added]

As previously noted, this statement seems to flatly contradict the notion that the photographs were produced collaboratively. According to her, Berman was the sole concever and executer of the work, and she was merely the means (part muse, part material) with which he did so. While her characterization of their working relationship opposes typical notions of collaboration as joint mental and/or physical labor, it nevertheless conjures the loose, dialectical style of collaboration described in this chapter. She describes their partnership as an exchange of favors: “out of respect,” she allowed him to appropriate her body and works, and he, in turn, expressed his “gratitude” by “protecting” her “from public scrutiny.” Her statement makes clear that, although Berman conceived the works, she secured the “freedom of expression” that made them possible. In this way, her account wonderfully reframes autonomy (a quality usually associated with artistic isolation) as a function of relationship. Indeed, as she describes it, the photographs’ production was profoundly intersubjective – conditioned on esteem, generosity, trust,

\footnote{433} “I would certainly have refused the printing of this photograph in a magazine of wide circulation, where the intent and purpose of this photographic effort may well be misunderstood” (DeFeo, letter to *Artforum*). She elaborated this sentiment in her 1984 interview with Solnit: “[I]t was also again, a very intimate portrait too, and I felt that any one of those [photographs] was . . . there have since been incidents where a single portrait out of that group has been misused in my opinion, separated and used without my permission. There was an occasion where one was published in *Artforum* magazine, which I took great offense to when it was put in there without my permission . . . , and I took great exception to that because I thought that out of the context of the whole it misrepresented me. . . . having something like that shown in isolation without any understanding of what the whole picture was, especially because in those days no one knew we were making art history, and both Wallace and I considered it a very private situation. It wasn’t a hidden situation. It was done . . . I mean the photographs were taken in the house without . . . my husband was present and all of that. There was no problem that way, but they weren’t shown publicly, but in a private showing. In his own home, they were shown with just certain artists and poets invited” (Interviews for *Secret Exhibition*, Bancroft).

\footnote{434} Halbertal describes this dynamic in *Revelation and Concealment*: “An exposure that might be perceived in relation to another subject as the violation of individuation and transgression of boundaries is experienced in a proper intimate context as an evocation of presence, a way out of isolation. The desire to disappear which accompanies that sense of violation of boundaries is replaced by an acute sense of being, though hesitant. It is for that reason that intimacy cannot be forced since the intimate context is an exposure that does not undermine our capacity to have a persona. . . . The quest for affirmation and comfort in areas that might in fact be prone to potential shame is what bonds concealment to revelation” (146).

\footnote{435} DeFeo, letter to Himelstein, April 20, 1978.
vulnerability, and the “privacy of the studio” and coterie.\textsuperscript{436} The “\textit{Artforum} incident” indicates how fragile and fleeting this space was.

Perhaps her fraught feelings towards the series prompted her, years after the photo shoot, to propose an alternative metaphor for their collaboration – one that set aside both the studio and the cabal. In 1965, during the hectic month leading up to her eviction from 2322 Fillmore and her forced completion of \textit{The Rose} (which coincided with her separation from Hedrick), she sent a collaged letter to Berman, who had since moved back to Los Angeles. Echoing his appropriation of her work six years before, she composed her note on a poster for the Los Angeles Film-Makers’ Festival that Berman had mailed to her (fig. 27). The advertisement featured his Verifax collage, \textit{Bouquet} (1964) (fig. 23). She treated \textit{Bouquet}’s reiterative radios as so many frames to fill, covering some of the appropriated images he had chosen with her own selections.\textsuperscript{437} In the margins, she scribbled a disjointed invitation for Berman and his family to attend the painting’s removal from her apartment. Her proposal acknowledges both her need for support during the traumatic event and his stake in the painting.\textsuperscript{438} After amending Berman’s poster, she folded it in quarters and bound the edges with masking tape to form a kind of postcard-pouch, which she then mailed.\textsuperscript{439}

Her alterations to \textit{Bouquet} work both with and against its formal and semantic structure: her vigorous folding and sloppy collage additions interrupt the poster’s seamless flatness and repetition, but this distortion amplifies the viewer’s ability to read \textit{Bouquet}’s images relationally, a latent potential previously muffled by the rigorous compartmentalization of its organizing grid. DeFeo’s epistolary appropriation creates a conflicted interdependence between the two works. Each work articulates its full range of meaning only through dialogue with the other, but their dialogue is marked by dissonance as much as resonance, a pushing against as much as an opening towards. In the corner containing her address, DeFeo nestled a snapshot of herself as a child, over which she glued two baseballs (emblazoned with the logo of the San Francisco Giants) – one in the upper left corner, the other in her cupped hands.\textsuperscript{440} She portrays herself not as a model or an esoteric symbol, but as a sandlot slugger. She humorously acknowledges the ambiguity of her dynamic collaboration with Berman by likening it to a baseball game. Through montage, she takes the mound and Berman the plate; passing the ball back and forth, they play both with and against each other.

\textsuperscript{436} Mark Himelstein, letter to Gilbert S. Edelson, May 2, 1978, The Jay DeFeo Trust.
\textsuperscript{437} Berman was likely delighted by DeFeo’s modification of his poster since it performed the kind of collaborations that he frequently engaged in and encouraged.
\textsuperscript{438} DeFeo also pasted a copy (printed on tissue paper) of the statement she wrote for the brochure to accompany \textit{The Rose}’s debut exhibition: “The White Rose is a Fact painted somewhere on a slow curve between destinations. This is all I remember. This is all I know. It is dedicated to the Universal Past time and all Giant fans who believed in the Second Coming of Casey Stengel. J. DeFeo 1965.” (She requested that Hopps print this statement in a letter dated May 10, 1965 (The Jay DeFeo Trust).) Like Martin and McClure’s original statements, it was never published. Also like Martin’s, it contains insider references; though her references to her and her friends’ obsession with the San Francisco Giants are decidedly less poetic than Martin’s. The statement is the epigraph for \textit{Jay DeFeo and The Rose}, though the final sentence is notably excised.
\textsuperscript{439} The two bottom images in the quadrant detailed in figure 27 faced out; thus, they state the sender’s and recipient’s addresses.
\textsuperscript{440} DeFeo likely cut the baseball images out of a program for the Giants’ 1964 season that she was collaging with snapshots of her friends (including, Hedrick and Brown) taken over the decade she lived at 2322 Fillmore (DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 1645). Through these playful modifications, she codifies the Fillmore circle (on the eve of its dispersal) into a “team.” Perhaps including scraps of the program on her mailer to Berman was a way of including him in the line-up.
Figure 1
Photograph of Wally Hedrick
Jay DeFeo
1959
Dimensions unknown
Reproduced in *Sixteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959)
Figure 2
Photograph of Jay DeFeo
Wally Hedrick
1959
Dimensions unknown
Reproduced in *Sixteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959)
Figure 3
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
7 ¼ x 5 ¾ inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 4
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
5 ⅛ x 4 ¼ inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 5
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
5 x 4 inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
**Figure 6**

Untitled gelatin silver print  
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo  
1959  
3 x 4 inches (image size)  
Figure 7
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
4 ½ x 4 ¼ inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 8
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
5 ½ x 5 ¼ inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 9
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
5 x 5 inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 10
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
4 ⅞ x 4 inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 11
Untitled gelatin silver print
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
5 x 4 inches (image size)
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
Figure 12
Untitled photograph
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
Dimensions unknown
Figure 13
Photograph of Jay DeFeo painting *The Rose*
Burt Glinn
1960
Figure 14
Untitled photograph of Jay DeFeo
Jerry Burchard
1959
Dimensions unknown
Reproduced in *Painting and Sculpture in the San Francisco Art Association: A Catalog of the Art Bank of the SFAA, 1959-60* (San Francisco: SFAA, 1959)
Figure 16
Figure 17
Photograph of Wallace Berman at Robert Fraser’s London apartment
Photographer unknown
1967
Dimensions unknown
Figure 18

Cross (Factum Fidei) (destroyed)

Wallace Berman
1956-57

Mixed media (wood, paper, ink, chain, photograph)

Dimensions unknown

Figure 19
Untitled photograph
Wallace Berman and Jay DeFeo
1959
Dimensions unknown
Figures 20 and 21
Untitled postcard
Wallace Berman
1959
Photomontage, ink and collage on board
4 ½ x 6 ½ inches
Digital image courtesy of The Whitney Museum of American Art
or "Perfect Man" (see page 372), and the following diagram shows which astrological star "rules" each part of the human hand. Venus "rules" the thumb, Mars the palm of the hand, the Moon the heel of the hand, Jupiter the first finger, Saturn the second finger, the Sun the third finger, and Mercury the fourth finger. See Cornelius Agrippa, chap. xxvii. (vol. ii. of the German translation, p. 160, Berlin, 1921).

KABBALISTIC SYSTEMS OF WRITING.

The KABBALISTS adopted certain well-known alphabets, Hebrew, Chaldean, etc., in writing their works, but they modified the forms of the letters and

**Figure 22**
Woodblock print of a kabbalistic palmistry diagram
Figure 23
Poster for The 3rd Los Angeles Film-Makers Festival that features *Bouquet*
Wallace Berman
1964
Offset lithograph of a Verifax collage
Approximately 16 x 16 inches
Reproduced in *Wallace Berman: Support the Revolution* (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1992)
Figure 24

_Peyote Eyes, Larkspur_

Patricia Jordan

1960

Dimensions unknown

Figure 25

*Semina* (editions 1-9)
Conceived and edited by Wallace Berman with various contributors
1955-64
Mixed media limited edition artist’s publication
Various dimensions (from 5 ½ x 3 ⅛ inches to 9 ½ x 8 inches)
Figure 26
Untitled self-portrait, Scott Street, San Francisco
Wallace Berman
1960
Gelatin silver print
Dimensions unknown
Figure 27
Detail of untitled correspondence for Wallace Berman
Jay DeFeo
1965
Mixed media (oil crayon, collaged printed material, photographs, tissue paper, stamps, and masking tape on a poster for the 3rd Los Angeles Film-Makers Festival)
Approximately 16 x 16 inches
Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Chapter 4

Myth, Memory and Make-believe:

Jay DeFeo’s creative process after and through The Rose

The Rose as Myth Maker

Despite DeFeo’s elaborate invitation, Berman and his family did not travel to San Francisco to witness the removal of The Rose from her apartment on November 9th 1965. However, another Fillmore circle artist, Bruce Conner, was present for the event and used his 16 mm camera to record the crew of Bekins movers gingerly crating the monumental painting, extracting it through a hole that they sawed in the sill of the studio’s bay window, hoisting it down to the street via hydraulic lift, and trucking it away. Over the next two years, he edited the six-hour proceedings down to a seven-minute film titled The White Rose: Jay DeFeo’s Painting Removed by Angelic Hosts. Taken together, the movie and Berman’s photographs from 1959 bookend DeFeo’s prolonged production of the painting with filmic representations of her relation to the work.

The White Rose diverges in several respects from the found-footage films that brought Conner acclaim among experimental filmmakers in the 1960s. It uses original instead of archival footage and is structurally distinct from his most frequently cited films – A Movie (1958), Cosmic Ray (1961), and Report (1967) – which splice blank frames between developed ones. Like his frequent use of disjunctive cuts, these interruptive hiccups in the moving picture (the longer of which register as interminable suspensions) remind viewers of the constructed nature of the projected world and thus refuse to transport them into it. In other words, Conner’s self-reflexive films rarely permit “the screen to function illusionistically as a window device.” The White Rose inverts these deconstructionist strategies and, instead, uses them in the service of story. It takes the unexposed frames that intrusively erupt at random in Conner’s other films and codifies them into punctuation marks that deliberately divide the narrative action into seven movements. Even the film’s somewhat dizzying use of a wide variety of shots helps engross viewers in the plot as the changes in pacing are generally timed to cadence shifts in the film’s plaintive soundtrack, an excerpt from Miles Davis’s version of Joaquín Rodrigo’s “Concierto de Aranjuez.”

442 The number of movements rises to nine if the film’s introductory and concluding titles are included. Stan Brakhage, who was active in San Francisco’s fledgling experimental film scene in the late 1950s, argued that Conner’s editing of The White Rose distinguishes it from his more acclaimed films: “He is also very anxious that you see the splice and that you see whatever the mechanics are of putting two pieces together. There is one film, however, in which he makes an exception to this, ‘The White Rose.’ Most people have overlooked this film in his work, but I think it is one of his greatest, if not the greatest. In it, he deliberately worked with ‘A’ and ‘B’ roll printing, used to conceal the splices. Every other shot is on a different roll – ‘checker-board editing,’ as it is also called. He went a long way to have no splices showing; thus if we do see a splice, we know he meant it to be seen. If he did not want them seen, he would have hidden them” (Film at Wit’s End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1989), 135). In a letter from 1976, Brakhage confessed to Conner that The White Rose and Take the 5:10 to Dreamland were his favorite films by the artist (Stan Brakhage, letter to Bruce Conner, February 4, 1976, Bruce Conner Papers, BANC MSS 2000/50 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).
443 For further analysis of the temporal effects created by Conner’s editing of The White Rose read Greil Marcus’s fabulous interpretation, “Ritual in Transfigured Time,” Film Comment, 2005, 62-66. Conner borrowed the film’s soundtrack from Davis’s album Sketches of Spain (1960), which features arrangements by Gil Evans.
The film’s first two acts are establishing sequences. In turn, they introduce the two settings and casts of characters that the narrative brings together. The film opens on the site where *The Rose* is destined to end up – the street below DeFeo’s apartment. This is the light and lively domain of the angelic hosts, who file out of their van wearing white jumpsuits and mill about with ladders, waiting to ascend. The second scene introduces their destination – DeFeo’s second-floor studio. The contrast between the two locales and their inhabitants could hardly be greater. Rather than a feeling of airy movement, Conner’s rapid cuts and twirling pans give the studio an unsettling air of insanity and enclosure, as if the camera were entering a madwoman’s lair or the unconscious mind. He first focuses on the dilapidated quality of the room, tracing exposed wires and lingering on the gagged mouth of a caved-in fireplace. Then he turns to its decrepit, uncanny population – a copse of defoliated Christmas trees and a workbench petrified under layers of paint.444 Suddenly, the camera shifts from the room’s shadowy periphery to the luminous painting, using jerky zoom sequences and soaring, vertiginous close-ups to augment its splendor and scale. Seen through Conner’s lens, *The Rose* is the magnificent, living heart of an enchanted but dying dominion.

DeFeo is notably absent from both realms: she appears in neither the outside and below of the movers nor the inside and above of *The Rose* (though the vacant stool before the painting begs her presence). She enters in the middle of the narrative – after the painting has been felled and a hole cut in the windowsill, but before the extraction. She appears, that is, once the painting’s fate is sealed, when what had been physically impossible is now imminent. Her late entry signals that she is peripheral to the main action announced by the movie’s subtitle, *Jay DeFeo’s Painting Removed by Angelic Hosts*.

Other aspects of the film’s representation of DeFeo likewise depict her as detached from and out of sync with the painting’s angel-aided expulsion. For example, the first shot of DeFeo shows her sitting on the fire escape of her apartment, a liminal space between the mover’s domain of the street and the painting’s domain of the studio.445 Even after entering the studio she remains distant from the hubbub, like a spirit haunting the proceedings. Moreover, her interactions with *The Rose*, while deliberate, decidedly lack the rationality and teamwork of the movers’ carefully coordinated efforts. In contrast to their goal-oriented actions, her gestures are mysterious, reflective, and symbolic; they read as personal rituals performed in response to the workers’ intrusive manipulation of her painting and its environment. For example, she sits in the fresh wound made by a workman’s saw in the studio windowsill, and in a brief but haunting sequence, she stretches across the surface of the shrouded and bound canvas as it reclines on the floor of her studio, fidgeting “as though she were trying to sleep fitfully on a large bed” (fig. 1).446 After the painting has been lowered to the street and is about to be swallowed by the van,

444 Rebecca Schoenthal focuses her analysis of *The White Rose* on Conner’s depiction of DeFeo’s dilapidated studio (*North Beach to Haight-Ashbury: Underground Artists and Community in 1950s San Francisco* (Diss. University of Virginia, 2005), 142-45). The trees, which Conner cuts to immediately after the street scene, offer a direct comparison to the movers: they are as dark, skeletal, frail, and static as the movers are light, hulking, brawny, and fluttering.

445 DeFeo first appears directly after the shot of a worker sawing through the windowsill. The back-and-forth motion of his saw rhymes with the swinging motion of her legs, a parallel which contrasts his purposeful labor with her play. The next shot shows her sitting in the hole made by the workman, as if the new opening enabled her entrance.

446 Bruce Conner, “*The Rose*: A eulogy as well as a proposal that *Rose* be seen in a different light,” 2004, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s *The Rose*, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. In this statement, Conner claims that none “of Jay’s actions [that are captured in *The White Rose*]...
DeFeo brings an atrophied Christmas tree to the window where *The Rose* once stood (fig. 2). The scrappy specter reads as both her co-witness to the painting’s departure and a futile (even pathetic) attempt to fill the physical void created by this event. As the movers drive away and the film closes, DeFeo appears to perform the same compensatory action with her body by lounging, precariously, in the hole through which the work exited (fig. 3).

Conner’s account of *The Rose*’s removal from 2322 Fillmore Street manages to be both genuinely moving and self-consciously melodramatic. The film generates pathos in part by marshalling metaphors of life and death. In the second act, Conner’s whirling camerawork and brisk splicing endow both painting and studio with an uncanny aliveness. This effect creates the impression of a symbiotic (probably parasitical) relationship between the work and its environment which is sundered by the movers’ invasive maneuvers. Greil Marcus has insightfully cataloged the many narratives of violent demise (e.g., “the hero and the dragon,” the film-noir “murder investigation,” etc.) conjured by Conner’s multivalent depiction of the painting’s reorientation from upright to recumbent.

In 2004, Conner once again used the concept of mortality to characterize the painting’s integration with and separation from DeFeo’s Fillmore community and studio:

> It is important to understand that not only was the environment, place and time integral to the meaning of *The Rose*, so was the specific geography and plan of the 2322 Fillmore Street flat – the specific site. The particularity of the proportion and character of the space where *The Rose* thrived for seven years created the impression of a living and breathing physical being.

Plucked from its nurturing surrounds and placed in a museum, *The Rose* became a “remnant and artifact of its magnificent and majestic living form.”

The film also emphasizes loss by depicting DeFeo’s reaction to the painting’s deportation as a series of mysterious, possibly mad, mourning rituals. By characterizing her as fragile and remote, the film knowingly likens her to the Romantic genius who is tragically damaged (i.e., driven insane, maimed, and/or killed) by his obsessive devotion to art. In a catalog statement

*Rose* were contrived for the benefit of the camera.” Her restless communion with the painting foregrounds its new horizontality.

Like the layers of accumulated paint that compose *The Rose*, the preserved Christmas trees materially retain time and, thus, seem to express DeFeo’s refusal to let go of the past. In this light, her substitution of a tree for the absent painting reads as a continuation of her longstanding efforts to stave off loss.

As is the case for most of Conner’s films, the tone of *The White Rose* is subtle and complex. He aptly described it as having “the character of a documentary with overtones of humor and drama” (“*The Rose*: A eulogy,” 2004). I characterize *The White Rose* as “self-consciously Romantic” because its melodramatic soundtrack and plethora of allusions give its romanticism a knowing feel without, remarkably, undermining the beauty and wonder of the event. Many film critics have marveled at Conner’s ability to weave together opposing tones. David Mosen, for example, remarked on the seamless confluence of “humor, horror, and truth” in *Report* (“Report,” *Film Quarterly*, Spring 1966, 56).

Anthropomorphizing rhetoric is extremely common in discussions of *The Rose*. Conner drew on it again in 1973 when he organized “A WAKE to the Memory of *The Rose* by Jay DeFeo,” a fundraising event for the painting held at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Marcus, 64-65.

Conner, “*The Rose*: A eulogy.” The melancholic tenor of Conner’s depiction of the end of the *The Rose*’s “life” on Fillmore Street is understandable given his involvement in the community for which the painting had become a potent symbol.


Honoré de Balzac’s *Frenhofer* from *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1831) epitomizes this ideal. DeFeo’s protracted production of *The Rose* has led several commentators to liken her to Balzac’s fictional genius. For example, see
written several years after his friend’s death in 1989, Conner borrowed this familiar narrative to recount the story of *The Rose*: “The painting is a masterpiece of spirit and transformation that almost destroyed her through lead poisoning and its dominance over her relationship to the conscious world. When Jay and *The Rose* were evicted by their landlord, the thread was lost and Jay’s life unraveled.”

According to Conner, production of *The Rose* consumed DeFeo so utterly that its loss shattered her both physically and psychologically. This melodramatic account fits the film’s characterization of her first attempts to cope with the painting’s absence as pitiful and slightly unhinged.

Conner’s melancholic appraisal of *The Rose*’s dramatic entry into the wide world beyond DeFeo’s studio was prescient. The painting’s public life was delayed, fleeting, and ultimately disappointing. Its debut at the Pasadena Art Museum was postponed by more than three years, and when the painting was finally shown in February 1969, it stayed on view for only a month before returning to the Bay Area for a two-month exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA). The final venue of the painting’s whirlwind tour was the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI, formerly the California School of Fine Arts) where Martin was serving as director and DeFeo was teaching part-time, commuting from her new home north of the city. By 1969, the interest that curators and collectors had shown in purchasing the painting a decade earlier had evaporated. Consequently, the SFAI conference room that was supposed to be a temporary stopover for *The Rose* became its indefinite home. This arrangement worked until the spring of 1971 when the SFAI terminated DeFeo’s teaching contract, at which point the deterioration of her relationship with the school, of her financial situation, and of the painting’s physical condition spurred her to find it a more permanent, lucrative, and secure abode.

This task proved to be not only challenging but also impossible. For three years, DeFeo solicited museums and private collectors to purchase *The Rose*. Many of her proposals involved plans to restore the canvas, and most steeply reduced the painting’s price (by her estimation) and/or included other works from her Fillmore period “as bait to clinch the deal.” After a particularly protracted and disheartening round of ultimately failed negotiations with The Oakland Museum, DeFeo enlisted Conner to manage her efforts to dispose of *The Rose*. She turned to Conner because he remained invested in the work’s welfare, in part because his film was screened when and wherever the painting was shown. His involvement with *The Rose* lasted until the summer of 1974 when Tony Rockwell, SFMA’s chief conservator working at Conner and DeFeo’s behest, encased the painting in plaster to arrest its deterioration. The work remained immured in an SFAI conference room for the rest of DeFeo’s life.

---


455 The facts contained in this basic sketch of *The Rose*’s post-Fillmore journey can be found in Judith Dunham’s thorough “Chronology” (*Jay DeFeo and The Rose*, ed. Jane Green and Leah Levy (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003), 155-68). Please see the appendix to this dissertation for a more detailed account of *The Rose*’s exhibition history and DeFeo and Conner’s attempts to save the painting.

456 Thomas Albright, letter to Jay DeFeo, April 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.

Even before *The Rose*’s literal disappearance, DeFeo’s assessment of the painting downplayed its physical presence. In October 1972, she articulated her current conception of the work in a letter to Conner concerning their conservation efforts:

> But back to the cost of restoration . . . I have had to rationalize . . not just cost, but more important motive . . in all this trouble and expense . . and all I come up with that is philosophically reasonable in my own thinking . . is that I feel I must do whatever I can to perpetuate the *myth of the Rose* . . and the poor painting is the physical symbol of that myth . . in its decline, but I must care for it as long as it may serve to remind others of loftier ideas.458

The passage reveals a paradox in DeFeo’s thinking about *The Rose*. She states that the “loftier ideas” that the painting represents justify her preservation of it, even though this conceptualist reading of the work makes its material form subsidiary to the meaning it conveys.459 Her representation of the painting post-Fillmore as a “physical symbol” of “the myth of the Rose” resembles Conner’s description of it as a “remnant and artifact of its magnificent and majestic living form.”460 Both accounts characterize *The Rose* circa 1970 as a self-reflexive sign, implying that it no longer provides direct experience but instead points, narcissistically, to its own story.461 Conner’s archaeological metaphor specifies that the decrepit painting refers to its past self, when the Fillmore community imbued it with vital significance. In contrast, DeFeo’s use of the term “myth” makes *The Rose*’s exact referent more ambiguous.462

While DeFeo’s reevaluation of *The Rose* in non-aesthetic terms is surprising given her commitment to form and material, it is also understandable given the work’s peculiar production and reception.463 The painting’s prolonged making invited narrativized conceptions of the piece, such as *Creative America*’s patriotic tale of intrepid adventure and DeFeo’s idea that its evolving surface rehearsed the stylistic progression of Western Art.464 *The Rose* continued to be framed by stories of its epic production even after it left the studio; both Martin’s exhibition pamphlet

---

458 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, October 27, 1972, Jay DeFeo papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 908. Ellipses and emphasis are original.

459 Whether or not DeFeo’s thinking about *The Rose* was directly influenced by Conceptual Art, the dramatic changes that the 1960s (i.e., the decade which passed during the painting’s construction) wrought on art opened up new ways to understand and value the aberrant work.

460 Conner, “*The Rose: A eulogy.*”

461 In other words, both DeFeo’s and Conner’s accounts imply that *The Rose*’s primary cultural value lies not in its aesthetic experience that it provides (not, that is, in its transmission of values via its specific material form) but rather in what it signifies.

462 It is impossible to determine precisely what DeFeo meant by the term ‘myth.’ She does not provide many details about “the myth of the Rose” beyond the fact that it is inspirational, that it reminds “others of loftier ideas.” In this chapter, I use the word according to its most common and general usage – as a narrative that is more fantastical than factual.

463 Moreover, it makes sense that DeFeo would give more weight to the non-tangible aspect of *The Rose* (its “myth”) as its material form became increasingly endangered due to its prolonged installation at the SFAI.

464 DeFeo expressed this idea in a note to Henry Hopkins: “It [*The Rose*] passed through several stages, each one of them valid. There was a kind of archaic version at six months, then followed a very developed geometric version which gradually transformed itself into a much more organic expression. Curiously this stage got thoroughly out of hand at one point, (baroque) and I managed to pull it all the way back to the final ‘classic’ Rose” (Jay DeFeo, note to Henry Hopkins, undated, Jay DeFeo’s Artist File, The Whitney Museum of American Art). She repeated this sentiment during an interview with Rebecca Solnit on June 20, 1988: “I call it like a whole kind of cycle of art history it [*The Rose*] went through: archaic, classic, to baroque, and then I realized how flamboyant the whole concept had got and I kind of pulled it back to a more classical stage” (Interviews for the book *Secret Exhibition*, Phonotape 4000 C: 8, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).
and Conner’s film colored gallery-goers’ perception of the painting with romanticized accounts of its making. In the letter quoted above, DeFeo acknowledged that *The Rose* needed such supplements to convey its full meaning: “I must care for it as long as it may serve to remind others of loftier ideas,” she wrote to Conner. “I appreciate your film so much for that reason . . . it says a lot the Rose can’t say for itself.” In this anthropomorphizing statement, the movie literally speaks for the painting, telling the inspirational story that the canvas (mute in its abstract materiality) is unable to communicate. While DeFeo expresses her appreciation for the film’s assistance, her wistful tone suggests regret that the “poor painting’s” unfortunate circumstances have magnified its limitations, increasing its reliance on more agile and articulate ambassadors, such as *The White Rose*.

Unlike Conner, however, DeFeo did not regard the painting as merely a sad sign pointing to irretrievable past experience; she believed that *The Rose*’s ability to signify (specifically, to launch narratives) also enabled it to generate new artworks in the present. This chapter investigates her counterintuitive idea that *The Rose* – a painting which she viewed as not only finished but also “in its decline” – remained the “core” of her “creative universe.” How, according to DeFeo, did the decrepit painting revive her artistic practice in the early 1970s? What role did she envision *The Rose* playing in her subsequent, mostly collage-based production, and what kinds of creative process did this interaction induce? I focus on two of the frameworks that she used to explain *The Rose*’s relationship to her present practice: memory and play. Through analysis of her writings and artworks, I find that she used both concepts to characterize her creative process as a transformative interplay between the absent and the present.

The discovery that DeFeo attributed a dialectical dynamic to her artistic invention in the 1970s prompts the chapter’s subsidiary inquiry: What happened to the Fillmore circle’s distinctive style of collaboration once the group dissolved? How did artists, such as DeFeo, adapt the intertextual and cross-medial working methods that they developed within the community to the new reality of their dispersed and isolated studios? I explore this question by situating DeFeo’s 1970s collage work within the biographical context of her personal and professional relationship with Conner. In sum, this chapter traces how DeFeo’s post-Fillmore artworks evolved from her myth making around *The Rose*, an inventive process in which Conner frequently participated. While my account takes the many stories generated by and about the painting as its subject, it is also, admittedly, one of them.

465 Initially, Walter Hopps, who was director of the Pasadena Art Museum when *The Rose* was removed from 2322 Fillmore, also wanted to incorporate photographs of the painting in progress into the exhibition. He expressed this plan to DeFeo in an undated letter, probably sent in 1965: “Please have Wally send me the photos right away depicting the various states of the painting as well as a photo of the work in its completed state which we will reproduce in our brochure” (Walter Hopps, letter to Jay DeFeo, undated, Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 2678). Hal Glicksman, who took over Hopps’ post, reiterated this possibility in 1968: “If there is any material, biographical data, statements, photographs of early states of *The Rose*, etc. that you wish to consider for incorporation in the brochure please be sure you have it in hand by December 30” (Hal Glicksman, letter to Jay DeFeo, December 19, 1968, Bruce Conner Papers, BANC MSS 2000/50 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

466 DeFeo, letter to Conner, October 27, 1972, AAA.

467 Ibid.

468 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, May 13, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, BANC MSS 98/32 c, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

469 I am aware that basing any discussion of DeFeo’s art on the idea of myth is controversial. Myth is generally used in relation to her works, especially to *The Rose*, as a pejorative term. For example, Jane Green and Leah Levy’s authoritative anthology on the painting sets out “to dismantle those aspects of the DeFeo myth that are not grounded
"In Memory of The Rose/The Rose as Memory"

In the decades following The Rose’s removal from 2322 Fillmore Street, Conner extended the Romantic narrative that he crafted in The White Rose to encompass DeFeo’s collages of the 1970s. He wrote a version of this epilogue in the catalog for her 1994 show at the Kohn Turner Gallery:

Jay worked on The Rose for seven years to the virtual exclusion of any other artwork. It took her another seven years, the amount of time it takes to replace every cell in the human body, before she could begin to reassemble the parts into a whole image. The fragments of value around her in a small house among the redwoods north of San Francisco were photographed and collaged and rephotographed as the most solid images her mind could bring close and secure. She chose the objects that she saved and used from the past as if they were holy artifacts . . . .

He represents her collage work as a therapeutic activity, as part of her slow recovery from the physical, mental, and spiritual trauma incurred by The Rose. For Conner, montage represents more than the medium that DeFeo chose after her Rose-induced hiatus from art making; it is a metaphor for her recuperation. He likens her montage activity to both the body’s ceaseless regeneration of cells and to the assembly of reliquaries; in short, he depicts it as both restorative and redemptive. The White Rose’s representation of DeFeo’s strange ritual with the Christmas tree prefigures Conner’s reading of her collage practice as rearranging the remnants of her life from Fillmore Street to fill the gaping hole left, in both her life and psyche, by The Rose.

In the early to mid 1970s, DeFeo also framed her current creative activity in relation to The Rose, though she envisaged this association quite differently than Conner. She repeatedly described the painting as a conduit between her past works and present production:

I view all my ideas with an ever changing retrospective eye. It is like a kaleidoscope. I see the Rose as something like that . . absorbing all that preceded it . . as if it were the core of my creative universe . . but unlike the idiot who wondered about my ‘encore’ I see it emitting my private collection of images vocabulary of visual symbols into ever changing patterns of images.

in fact, illuminating the work itself” (Jane Green and Leah Levy, “Introduction,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, 4). They rightly argue that the often clichéd and psychologizing stories told about the painting distract attention away from the work itself and, consequently, thwart attempts to understand DeFeo as an artist. While I heartily agree that myth needs to be approached cautiously, especially given that DeFeo is a female artist, it would be wrong to ignore the topic considering that it was (in the 1970s, at least) crucial to her thinking about The Rose. If engaged critically, the idea of “the myth of the Rose” highlights many of the work’s aspects (such as the tension it stages between objecthood and process) that make it a fascinating and unique, yet indicative, contribution to the art of the twentieth century. By using the many versions of “the myth of The Rose” that DeFeo told to explore her practice in the 1970s, this chapter uses myth to reveal, rather than mask, her art practice.

471 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, May 13, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning The Rose, Bancroft.

The “idiot” who “wondered about” DeFeo’s “encore” was Gerald Adams. He wrote a feature on DeFeo titled “Lady in Search of an Encore” for the San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle on September 21, 1969. Bill Berkson claims that DeFeo also used a kaleidoscope metaphor to describe The Rose during a talk at Mills College in 1986 (Bill Berkson, “The Romance of The Rose,” Jay DeFeo: Selected Works (Philadelphia: Goldie Paley Gallery, Moore College of Art and Design, 1996), 29).
But when I once again had a place to work and the energy was restored, I began to see the Rose as a storehouse for all the symbol shapes and imagery that went into it, releasing all the ideas that have come since. 472

With some perspective, I see the Rose as a kind of culmination of all the painting experience that preceded it. Now it is providing (graciously) a kind of feed-back . . . so much [is] growing out of it in terms of future ideas. 473

Whether she likens The Rose to a “kaleidoscope,” a “storehouse,” or a “culmination,” DeFeo portrays the painting as “absorbing” all aspects of her past creative activity (from the distinctive forms, symbols and ideas that characterize her artworks to the skills and experience that produced them) and “releasing” them into the present. Crudely put, she imagines that the painting recycles her previous artistic experiences and creations to generate her current works.

While DeFeo’s kaleidoscope simile and Conner’s allegory of healing both evoke fragmentation and, thus, her chosen medium of collage, they assign The Rose disparate roles in her montage practice. For Conner, the figurative shattering of The Rose (and, by extension, DeFeo’s life and self) is symbolic of the trauma and loss incurred by her draining experience creating the work. In his narrative, she uses collage to recover from the painting. By contrast, DeFeo’s kaleidoscope metaphor depicts the The Rose’s shattering as inherently generative. The fragmented painting engenders “future ideas” by constantly recombining shards of her past and present creative activity into novel constellations, as a kaleidoscope’s spinning prism churns the contents of its barrel and the view beyond into a whirling amalgam. Her kaleidoscope metaphor animates the moribund “fragments” and “artifacts” from Fillmore Street that Conner evokes, transforming them from scraps representing a lost whole into enlivened building blocks for future works. In sum, her account endows The Rose with agency and generosity, qualities which contrast sharply with Conner’s characterization of it as a depleting drain on her creative powers.

This section argues that DeFeo viewed The Rose in the early 1970s as performing the tasks of memory. Many of the images that she uses in the above quotes to describe the painting’s curious but crucial function in her practice are common metaphors for memory. Her depiction of the work as a “storehouse” fits the conceit that memory is a containing structure for past experience, while the figure of the “kaleidoscope” conveys the familiar notion that the mind’s (largely subconscious) stores color our experience of the present, like glass beads refracting the view of what lies directly in front of us. 474 In the first quoted passage, DeFeo applies the kaleidoscope metaphor to both her “ever changing retrospective eye” and The Rose – a slippage which effectively conflates her memory with her painting. 475

472 DeFeo, note to Hopkins, The Whitney. It seems significant that DeFeo follows this statement by quoting the William Blake poem published in Semina 4. See note 15 from chapter 3 for details about this poem and its significance to DeFeo. 473 Jay DeFeo, “Biography of Jay DeFeo,” 1975, Jay DeFeo’s Artist File, The Oakland Museum of California. 474 For a helpful summary of humanistic thinking on memory in the twentieth century see Myrian Sepulveda Santos, “Memory and Narrative in Social Theory,” Time and Society, September 2001, 163-89. 475 The never-published statement that DeFeo wrote for The Rose’s debut exhibition at The Pasadena Art Museum suggests that, by 1965, she already saw the painting as dominating her mnemonic and epistemological experiences of the world. The first half of the statement expresses this idea: “The White Rose is a Fact painted somewhere on a slow curve between destinations. This is all I remember. This is all I know” (Jay DeFeo, collaged letter to Wallace Berman, 1965, Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution). By describing The Rose as “a Fact painted somewhere on a slow curve between destinations,” this poetic statement acknowledges the tension in the work between discreet objecthood and perpetual process – the contradiction between, on the one hand, the painting’s formal gestalt and mesmerizing material presence and, on the
As The Rose transformed, in DeFeo’s estimation, from a work in progress into an avatar for her memory its temporal structure also shifted. According to DeFeo, the painting conveyed a chronological conception of time when it was under production. Her equation of the painting’s development to the stylistic evolution of Western art expresses this idea. The finished work manifests sequential organization in a geological way; its layers of paint resemble sediment accumulated on the Earth’s crust. The kaleidoscope metaphor explodes these fossilized strata into swirling smithereens. While the painting-as-object calcifies time into a static sequence, the painting-as-memory draws disparate moments together to generate a future. It represents time as a dynamic “pattern” rather than as a petrified, unilinear progression. This distinction is reminiscent of one that Walter Benjamin drew between his account of history as a dialectical image – in which liberated “splinters” of “the Then and the Now come together into a constellation” – and historicism’s view of time as an “additive” succession of homologous moments. Like Benjamin, DeFeo judged this montage-like temporality to be both melancholic and potentially redemptive.

How, if at all, did the mnemonic character that DeFeo attributed to her creative practice manifest in the procedures and formal language that she used in the 1970s? Photographic evidence of DeFeo’s studio at the time corroborates the kaleidoscopic dynamic that she ascribed to her creative process. In 1971, she began to regularly photograph her workspace and to compile proof sheets of the resulting images in binders (fig. 4). As she explained to Miller in 1977, “I’ve got a ‘visual diary’ of the progress of my work since 1971. I’ve made books out of literally hundreds of contact prints that say far more at a glance about my work patterns and thought processes over the years than any words can hope to convey.” The logs continued, in a more meticulous and comprehensive fashion, her use of photography to document The Rose’s shifting surface. Like her images of The Rose, the proof sheets chart the evolution of individual works over time, but they also map the spatial relationships between works – specifically, between the unfinished drawings, paintings, and collages that cluttered her studio. In this way, the catalogs associate the changes that discrete works undergo from frame to frame with the constellations into which they are arranged within each frame. They suggest, in other words, that other, its elusiveness, the way it refuses closure by opening up to narratives of growth and decay. Moreover, by claiming that the work is all she remembers and knows, DeFeo describes the work as subsuming her subjectivity. The statement (which deserves further analysis) is a significant predictor of DeFeo’s conflation of The Rose with her memory in the 1970s.

476 DeFeo, note to Hopkins, The Whitney. DeFeo’s emphasis on progress does not account for the recursive nature of her painting process or for her use of subtractive techniques.

477 Santos, “Memory and Narrative in Social Theory,” 180-81. I believe that this analogy is helpful even though DeFeo’s conception of the montage-like temporality of her art practice obviously lacks the Marxist politics and geopolitical implications of Benjamin’s theory of history.

478 DeFeo made her studio in the modest home that she shared with John Bogdano. Their house was located in Larkspur, a small town in Marin County just north of San Francisco.

479 Given the importance of process to DeFeo it is not surprising that she began to meticulously document it when she took up photography in the early 1970s. She continued the practice of recording her workspace for the rest of her life. Most of her logs are currently held by The Jay DeFeo Trust. Elizabeth Sussman, who has provided the most comprehensive analysis of the logs to date, likens them to Leo Steinberg’s flatbed picture plane because they capture “the flux of life and of art” and provide “a place for chance juxtapositions” (Elizabeth Sussman, “Behold! The Tripod!” Jay DeFeo: Her Tripod and its Dress (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2003), 10-11). Her analysis, like my own, also recognizes the importance of “juxtaposition,” “overlaying and interplaying relationships,” and transformation to her practice.

480 Quoted from Sussman, 10. While some photographs appear to be candid snapshots of her workspace, others seem to depict staged arrangements of the works and objects in her studio.
juxtaposition propelled DeFeo’s creative process – that the direction in which she took a work emerged (in part, at least) from its relation to the works around it. Some photographs show that she interspersed previous studio shots and older, completed works into her arrangements. These images imply that DeFeo drew inspiration from connecting works across not only space but also time.\textsuperscript{481} The artistic process depicted in her “visual diary” therefore accords with the kaleidoscope metaphor that she used to describe it: both identify the juxtaposition of past and present as a catalyst for transformation.\textsuperscript{482}

After Image (1970), the first work that DeFeo made after The Rose, demonstrates some of the richest techniques that she used to create temporal complexity (fig. 5). The relationship that it constructs, through form and facture, to earlier works by DeFeo helps clarify her understanding of memory and the kinds of creativity that it engenders. The modestly-scaled work on paper is a luscious medley of materials and textures. A fine graphite drawing shellacked with a dazzling coat of transparent acrylic paint rests inside a torn frame of crumpled tracing paper.\textsuperscript{483} The jagged hole in the gauzy top layer usually (depending on the light source) casts a thin shadow that imperfectly traces the centered drawing. The tissue’s delicateness rhymes with the brittleness of DeFeo’s line, but its matte fragility sharply contrasts with the glossy lushness of the drawing’s sealed surface.

The drawn form also has the look of an amalgam. Composed of thin, undulating corrugations, the involuted ovoid evokes organic connotations, but the references that it conjures are many and mixed. As Brigid Doherty observes, the image’s “ridges and crevices . . . alternately resemble brittle, razor-edged stone and pliant, supple petals.”\textsuperscript{484} I would add to this list crisply layered plumage and the elegant whorls of a seashell. The figure is evocative but frustratingly unplaceable, like a word on the tip of one’s tongue. Indeed, the form’s presence is simultaneously commanding and tenuous: the impression that the glimmering shape has burst through the tissue gives it a triumphant appearance, yet the veil’s encroaching shadow still threatens to obscure the drawing.\textsuperscript{485} Likewise, the glistening surface of the perplexing image makes it radiant but difficult to behold as a whole.

DeFeo stated that the image was based on a seashell that she kept in her studio, but added that the form also “connected me with The Rose as well as my large Eyes drawing” (figs. 6 and

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{481} The fact that DeFeo integrated photographs of her studio back into that space indicates that the images not only recorded her “work patterns and thought processes” but also played an active role in producing them. Judging from their crowded compositions, the photographs mapped relationships between works. Incorporated back into the space that they depicted, the images acted like The Rose: they provided “feedback” between her past and future works. They acted, in short, like memory aids. The distance provided by lens and print may also have enabled DeFeo to discover unexpected connections between her works. In any case, the act of taking and viewing the contact sheets probably provided a pause in the rush of making, fostering a space for the reflection and assessment needed to catalyze new creative directions.
\item \textsuperscript{482} In other words, the kaleidoscope is an apt figure for the process implied by her studio shots because it also inextricably links progress to pattern or transformation to constellation. DeFeo’s photographs may even have inspired the metaphor.
\item \textsuperscript{483} DeFeo’s use of transparent acrylic in After Image looks ahead to her application of it to create layered drawings in the 1980s. For an insightful analysis of this technique see Dana Miller, “I Should Go to the Very Center, No End: Works on Paper from the 1980s (Santa Fe, NM: Dwight Hackett Projects, 2006), 5-9.
\item \textsuperscript{484} Doherty, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{485} Constance Lewellan also notes that the image appears to have “just broken through a film of translucent paper” (Constance Lewellan, “Mountain Climbing,” Jay DeFeo: Selected Works (Philadelphia: Goldie Paley Gallery, Moore College of Art and Design, 1996), 17).
\end{itemize}
Her identification of multiple sources for the drawing accounts for its equivocal character and fits the cross-pollination between old and new images depicted in her studio photographs. *After Image* also points to another relationship captured by the proof sheets – that between DeFeo’s works and the curious cast of objects that populated her workspace and occasionally served as models. In *After Image*, older works haunt the new through formal allusion. Doherty notes that the “orificial image recalls the shape of *The Eyes*, and the shell’s regular folds emerge from its center, recalling the radial convergence of *The Rose*.” DeFeo’s statement that *After Image* “connected” her with the Fillmore period works suggests that the references embedded in the drawing were unintended – that the act of depicting the seashell dredged up recollections of her past pieces which, in turn, molded her perception and representation of the object before her.

The work’s title and many of its formal aspects also evoke involuntary memory. An after image is the negative trace of something beheld (a bright light, for example) that temporarily lingers in the visual field after the object vanishes or the viewer looks away. As a reflexive intrusion of the past into the present, the perceptual phenomenon crystallizes DeFeo’s description of *After Image*’s production. The drawing’s simultaneous insistence and precariousness corresponds with the automatic yet ephemeral nature of after images and involuntary memories in general – with the way that they intrude unexpectedly into view only to vanish “in the blink of an eye.” Like her kaleidoscope metaphor, the work’s title implies that memory drives creativity by mediating vision, causing images to interpenetrate. *After Image*’s veil of tracing paper likewise suggests superimposition as does the specific way that the drawing combines its three referents; instead of appending individual features of each work side-by-side to create a declarative hybrid, it layers *The Rose*’s cruciform composition onto *The Eye*’s ovoid shape onto the shell’s brittle texture to form a haunting whole. Moreover, since the drawing amalgamates an object that was currently present in DeFeo’s studio with works that had long vanished from it, it mimes the way in which involuntary memory coats perceived objects with a cascade of unconscious associations, enacting a mutual permeation of present and absent, external and internal, mind and matter that makes sight transformative.

How *After Image* appropriates the earlier artworks speaks to DeFeo’s understanding of the transformations performed by memory – of the ways that mnemonic processes mold our view of not only the present but also the past. *After Image* translates *The Rose*’s sculptural ridges and valleys into illusionistic ripples, and it shrinks both the monumental painting and drawing down

---

486 Quoted from Marla Prather, “Beside *The Rose*: DeFeo’s Work at the Whitney Museum,” *Jay DeFeo and The Rose*, xvii. DeFeo featured the shell in several other works from the 1970s, such as her studies for *September Blackberries* (1972).

487 Doherty, 37. Lewellan also discusses these formal resonances (17). She further claims that the central figure in *After Image* is “the precise size of one of the eyes in *The Eyes,*” but I have not been able to confirm this assertion. As Doherty’s description implies, the shell form simultaneously invites and wards off touch, fostering a surrealist mix of desire and fear. The drawing’s conflicted tone could be interpreted as evocative of the precious yet threatening character of memories.

488 Ibid. Thomas Albright, DeFeo’s friend and art critic for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, similarly noted *After Image*’s peculiar mixture of persistence and precariousness in a 1971 letter to the artist: “It’s a curious thing about those creases and torn edges and faded colorations; maybe they weren’t consciously intended, but I thought they were immensely effective, projecting a kind of feel of age and decay through which the images, for all their fleeting, elusive qualities, manage to preserve, like some magical symbol discovered on an ancient papyrus manuscript” (quoted from Lewellan, 17-18).

489 Doherty reaches a similar conclusion about *After Image*: “Like *The Eyes*, the drawing declares unmediated vision a fiction” (37). She also notes that the work’s title “locates *After Image* in relation to DeFeo’s earlier works, connoting contingency and asserting an interpenetration of images” (37).
to handheld scale. In addition to flattening and miniaturizing, *After Image* turns the works’ expansive compositions in on themselves: it wraps *The Rose’s* reaching rays and *The Eyes* rocketing perspective lines around the shell, containing their infinity within the object’s delimited circumference. The later work, in sum, makes the epic, outward-turning images intimate and self-contained. In this way, it suggests that memory distills unwieldy experience into manageable, possessable figments. The drawing’s resemblance to a shell likens this psychic process to the slow, accretive and depletive action of ocean currents; adrift in DeFeo’s memory, the colossal works have been coalesced and whittled down to wash up on the shore of her consciousness as an enigmatic souvenir.

The product of this sea change retains some of the mystery of the deep. While the drawn image’s diminutive scale gives it the air of a possessable object, its hollowness makes it elusive. Its horizontal seam unfurls just enough to reveal a dark interior without disclosing the contents of that recess. By taunting viewers in this way, the image implies that its most valuable feature is hidden, like a pearl, behind its mute lips. Although *After Image* underscores the generative power of memory, this detail hints at the losses incurred by mnemonic transfiguration: the shell’s latent cargo suggests the aspects of previous experience that are withheld from consciousness in the morphed form that the past assumes in reminiscence. DeFeo’s drawing technique also thematized loss. A conservation report written for The Menil Collection, which currently houses *After Image*, notes that the drawing’s contour is heavy and gouged, suggesting that it was made by tracing.490 The torn top layer of copying paper testifies to this otherwise hidden procedure. If the report is correct, then the drawing is literally an after image – an index of a vanished original, and making the work performed the same interplay of dependence and separation, presence and absence conveyed by its form and media.491

Created two years following *After Image*, *Tuxedo Junction* (1972) communicates a slightly divergent account of memory (fig. 8).492 The mixed-media work incorporates material rather than formal references to DeFeo’s earlier oeuvre: it physically appropriates three large scraps of *Estocada* (1965), a massive oil-on-paper painting which hung in her Fillmore studio until eviction forced its dismantling.493 In 1977, DeFeo recounted *Tuxedo Junction’s* circuitous production in a letter to Miller: “It would seem that the creative life is akin to some kind of mindless animal life in that when it is thwarted in fulfilling its destiny, it reroutes itself somehow and finds a detour eventually. So it was with *Estocada*, which I hauled around with me for years... finally these three fragments fell into a trilogy that seemed right and became titled ‘*Tuxedo Junction*.’”494 The puncture marks that pock the three snippets of *Estocada* evidence their long

---

490 Conservation Report on *After Image*, The Menil Collection, accessed on March 13, 2008. This technique echoes Freud’s famous conception of memory as a mark upon the unconscious, which he put forward in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad” (1925).
491 Doherty similarly notes that the work’s title foregrounds both contingency and irretrievability (18).
492 Both Sussman (11) and Stephanie Hanor (“Seeing through Making,” *DeFeo* (San Francisco: Hosfelt Gallery, 2011)) discuss *Tuxedo Junction* in relation to time and memory in general terms.
493 Unfortunately, there are no known installation shots of *Estocada*. The titles *Estocada* and *Tuxedo Junction* are reminiscent of Frank Stella’s Black Paintings in that they appropriate evocative and seemingly unassociated terms (here, a bull-fighting pass and a jazz song) to designate staunchly abstract works.
494 Quoted from Sussman, 11. After the passage quoted above, DeFeo notes: “Other fragments of *Estocada* found some posterity through my photography.” These photographs, which were made the same year as *Tuxedo Junction*, recall the surrealists’ use of close-up to draw out unexpected connotations. By scrambling the viewer’s sense of scale, for example, some of the photographs transform the crumbling scraps of *Estocada* into rocky fjords, while others liken their puckered surfaces to scarred skin tissue. The series also continues DeFeo’s longstanding interest in the relationship between texture and tonality. The Jay DeFeo Trust contains several cutout photographs of the
tenure within the perpetually shifting arrangement of images pinned and stapled to DeFeo’s studio walls. As is typical of her statements about process in the 1970s, her evocative analogy of creativity to “mindless animal life” characterizes artistic invention as a largely instinctual or subconscious activity.

Her description of the borrowed bits of Estocada as “fragments” is apt: unlike in After Image, the old work assumes a staunchly piecemeal form in Tuxedo Junction. The scraps’ jagged edges declare their incompleteness, and DeFeo quarantines each remnant within a separate panel, an arrangement which prevents them from coalescing into a new whole. While the boards abut one another in a horizontal row, the three fragments are divided by smooth expanses of gesso and the hairline fissures between the supports. By referring to the composition as a “trilogy,” DeFeo acknowledged the perceptual strain in Tuxedo Junction between part and whole – between the autonomy of each scrap and the cohesiveness of the new work that subsumes them. Moreover, DeFeo’s loose arrangement of Estocada’s remains confuses the status of the largely-exposed masonite panels on which they rest.495 Are the boards integral to Tuxedo Junction or are they merely supports for the fragments? In other words, what role do the panels play in our perception of the piece? Do they factor into our aesthetic experience as a material component of the work or as a framing device for it?

While Tuxedo Junction leaves this question unanswered, its bewildering combination of materials has the definitive effect of accentuating the temporal disparity between the scraps and the panels. Each board’s immaculate, creamy surface emphasizes the worn quality of the painted paper, which creases, flakes, and discolors like burnt skin. Likewise, the former’s rectilinear regularity exaggerates the latter’s ragged, curling edges which mar the smooth surface with jagged shadows. The pristine panels impress upon the viewer that the frail, faded, and fragmented objects that they support have been subjected to the brutalizing passage of time.

The ambiguous relationship that Tuxedo Junction forges between disparate, materially-embodied temporalities causes the viewer’s experience to shuttle unsteadily between past and present. If the masonite panels are perceived as frames, then Tuxedo Junction reads as a display of artifacts from Estocada. This interpretation prompts the viewer to interact with the work as she would an exhibit at a natural history museum – to search for clues to the lost original that the shards represent (hints like the curving swath of black on the right-hand fragment which suggests a circular form).496 Ultimately, however, Tuxedo Junction thwarts efforts to retrieve its seminal image. Observing that the regularly-spaced scraps were obviously not assembled with an eye to reconstruction generates the assumption that DeFeo based their composition on formal considerations. This revelation, in turn, invites the viewer to regard Tuxedo Junction as a coherent (if composite) artwork. Instead of treating the paper fragments as synecdochic

three scraps of Estocada that DeFeo eventually resurrected as Tuxedo Junction. One of these simulacral fragments is backed with mounting tape, and several others appear in her studio log hung on plain supports. Both pieces of evidence indicate that she was experimenting with how to arrange the Estocada fragments by using photographs of them as models.

495 Indeed, Tuxedo Junction combines its old and new components in a way that troubles aesthetic categorization. The fragments of Estocada are spaced too far apart for Tuxedo Junction to read securely as a collage. Only the notoriously vague term ‘mixed-media’ suffices as an appropriate identifier.

496 Several of DeFeo’s aesthetic choices for Tuxedo Junction cultivate this analogy. Devoid of the artist’s touché, the antiseptic white boards more closely resemble the backing of a butterfly case than a Robert Ryman monochrome. They look, that is, more like framing devices for preservation than bearers of aesthetic interest. My description of the Estocada scraps as artifacts resonates with Conner’s characterization of DeFeo’s Fillmore-based works from the 1970s. Sussman similarly writes that DeFeo becomes her own historian in such works (11).
signifiers of an absent work, the viewer attends to the current play of shapes, colors, and textures between them and the gessoed boards. In sum, the tension in the mixed-media work between part and whole pulls the viewer’s consciousness back and forth between *Estocada* and *Tuxedo Junction*, between an absent work and the present one created from it, between imagining an irretrievable past and experiencing the present that it has given onto.

*Tuxedo Junction* thus offers a more violent account of memory than does *After Image*. While the earlier work describes recollection as an organic fusion of then and now, the later piece characterizes it as a volatile shudder between temporalities. This difference stems from the works’ distinctive means of recycling DeFeo’s Fillmore oeuvre – from the fact that *After Image* layers formal allusions to her earlier works, while *Tuxedo Junction* juxtaposes material references to them. However, the works’ underlying affinity outweighs this discrepancy. Both pieces were created by bringing together old and new images or materials. Through this merger, moreover, both show the interplay of the absent and the present to yield generative transformations as well as loss. In this way, *After Image* and *Tuxedo Junction* corroborate DeFeo’s account of the mnemonic nature of her artistic process. Indeed, the kaleidoscope, the object which she selected to emblematize her dialectical practice, generates patterns through both superimposition and juxtaposition – the respective means by which *After Image* and *Tuxedo Junction* combined old and new, absent and present, then and now.

After making *Tuxedo Junction*, DeFeo continued to explore the ambiguities of memory by repeatedly photographing a fragment of *White Spica*, another large, unfinished painting/drawing on paper which she began in 1958. Unlike in the works discussed above, she appropriates an old work through photographic reproduction rather than formal or material reference. Some of the photographs are cut and/or torn. Many of these works play with the ontological confusions induced by photographic reproduction. For example, she cut and tore one photograph so that its edges almost perfectly follow those of the scrap it depicts. This simple gesture muddies the perceptual distinction between original and reproduction, signified and signifier. Only the photograph’s torn right edge – which veers away from the fragment’s border to reveal the shadow it casts within the image – definitively identifies it as a representation. In sum, these works exaggerate the slippery play between presence and absence that makes photographic representation akin to memory.

Why did DeFeo select *The Rose* to figure this mnemonic account of her artistic process? What purpose did this myth serve, and how did the painting lend itself to embodying her memory and practice? Since the evidence to answer these complex questions is limited and circumstantial, I can only offer vague speculations by way of a response. As this section has shown, DeFeo’s appropriation of *The Rose* to represent her creativity is just one instance of her cannibalizing Fillmore-period works to either construct or conceptualize new works in the early 1970s. Her past œuvre, that is, provided the literal and theoretical foundation for her return to art making after *The Rose*. It is easy to imagine a psychological explanation for her recursive approach to this crucial transition. One could reasonably argue that she continued to focus her creative practice through *The Rose* because it had utterly dominated the past decade of her production and had come to define her artistic identity. According to this interpretation, her conflation of *The Rose* with her memory evidences a continued need to identify herself through the painting; in other words, it expresses her anxieties about self-reinvention. Likewise, her fantastical account of the painting’s seminal role in her current practice could be read as a symptom of her inability to accept that her masterpiece was complete and, by extension, that the Fillmore chapter of her life was closed. After all, this myth had the double benefit of staving off
closure while, at the same time, facilitating her renewed productivity. It also comfortingly reversed the painting’s dismal present condition, transforming it from a crumbling and unwanted work with presumably no future into the progenitor of her future oeuvre.497

This pathologizing narrative echoes Conner’s interpretation of DeFeo’s artistic activity in the early 1970s as a therapeutic means of recovering from The Rose. While tempting, these ultimately-unprovable biographical explanations are at best distracting and at worst reductive. I will now step out from under their shadow to explore other factors that likely influenced DeFeo’s decision to look to her past to create anew. It seems likely, for instance, that she re-established her creative practice under the sign of memory, in part, because this framework reiterated the relational dynamic that her art making acquired in the Fillmore circle. Her kaleidoscope metaphor describes a creative process that was, in essence, already evident in her show at the Dilexi Gallery in 1958 – a process in which works develop through dialogue with other works across differences of media, scale, theme, and form. Her works from the early 1970s add one more attribute to this list – time.498 Notably, this dialectical dynamic also characterizes the intertextual style of collaboration that developed in the Fillmore community. To make After Image and Tuxedo Junction, she applied to her old works the techniques (material appropriation and formal allusion) that she frequently used to recycle her friends’ works (such as Berman’s poster for the Los Angeles Filmmakers’ Festival).

DeFeo’s motives for adapting patterns of making that were endemic to the Fillmore circle to the first works that she produced outside the community are unclear. Did she knowingly revive the circle’s dialogical approach to artistic production or did habit draw her unconsciously back to it? If the former, then what significance did this style of creativity hold for her? Regardless of DeFeo’s reasons for carrying this mode of making into her post-Fillmore practice, the small adjustments that she made to it notably reflect her changed view of The Rose in the early 1970s. As noted above, when DeFeo repackaged the Fillmore circle’s dialectical model of production as memory, she endowed it with temporal complexity. That is, she envisioned her works evolving from the push and pull not only between different forms and media but also between different moments – between then and now, the absent and the present. Her contemporary efforts to conserve The Rose gave it a similarly manifold temporality by imaginatively projecting the old work (which was indicative of her Fillmore Street past) into the future.499 Her concern over The Rose likely also increased the painting’s appearance in her thoughts while, at the same, underscoring its physical distance from her – a paradoxical effect similar to memory’s poignant interplay of presence and absence. It seems plausible, in sum, that the peculiar relationship that DeFeo developed with The Rose as it languished in the SFAI

497 She even attributes generosity – the quality which Berman deemed crucial to artistic exchange – to the painting’s generative role in her current practice.
498 In other words, the composite temporalities of many of the artwork constellations depicted in DeFeo’s contact sheets distinguish them from her Dilexi installation and register the fact that she conceptualized the relational dynamics of her post-Rose practice under the sign of memory.
499 As a physical manifestation of the passage of time, the layered painting (like the grove of old Christmas trees in DeFeo’s Fillmore studio) always had the potential to represent the dialectical temporality of memory. As the archaeologist Laurent Olivier explains, conceptualizing “material things” as the bearers of time scrambles the continuum of history, because “unlike historical events,” objects “remain and last for as long as the material of which they are made lasts. Material things embed themselves in all subsequent presents,” and in doing so, embed pasts in the present (Laurent Olivier, “The Past of the Present: Archaeological Memory and Time,” Archaeological Dialogues, 2004, 205). Olivier likens this effect to Benjamin’s conception of history as a dialectical image.
prompted her to re-envision the painting as memory and to adapt her old habits of making accordingly.

Playing with Rose

Montage continued to play a prominent role in DeFeo’s practice long after her tentative return to art making. In 1971, she began to experiment with exposing and developing photographs, and she frequently used prints of objects in her studio and of the flowers and vistas around her home as raw materials for her collages.500 DeFeo’s friendship with Conner is often cited as the biographical backdrop of her photo-collages.501 The old friends became even closer around 1972 when Conner started to assist her efforts to conserve and place The Rose. They regularly conversed for hours over the phone and exchanged numerous letters (and even the occasional telegram) between her house in Larkspur and his apartment in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. Their discussions revolved around The Rose’s future and the creative doldrums that both artists felt they were currently experiencing.502 Both personal and professional, the relationship that they cultivated in the 1970s is difficult to categorize. Conner made this point in a letter to DeFeo when describing his encounter with her gallerist: “I called myself manager because it has a better effect and sounds better than other phrases like psychic advisor, jester, minister, old pal, etc.”503 The multiplicity of roles that he saw himself playing in DeFeo’s life testifies to the intimacy and complexity of their bond at the time.

Given that DeFeo frequently incorporated overt references to her exchanges with Conner into her photo-collages from 1973, it is little wonder that commentators have connected the two. Many of the montages conjure the pair’s main medium of communication by picturing parts of an antiquated candlestick telephone that DeFeo kept in her studio. One of these works even crafts a silhouette of the phone (turned flower) from a reproduced drawing by Conner (fig. 9). Furthermore, she unequivocally linked such works to Conner by labeling them Untitled (for B.C.). Some of the visual references to their relationship that appeared in her photo-collages re-entered their correspondence, as when DeFeo converted a photograph of the telephone into Conner’s birthday card (fig. 10). The image reveals the surrealist alterations that she made to the actual telephone – mounting it on a tripod and replacing its hanging receiver with a light bulb. The ersatz flame emerges from the cord like a flash of insight above the head of a cartoon character. Her modifications thus imagine the telephone as both an instrument for art making (i.e., a camera) and a source of inspiration.504 They suggest, in short, that she found conversing with Conner to be creatively invigorating.

This section examines the oft-cited yet under-theorized connection between DeFeo’s photo-collages of the early 1970s and her relationship with Conner. I argue that this association extended beyond the well-known biographical fact that Conner provided his friend with moral

---

500 Dunham, “Chronology,” 161.
501 See, for example, Sussman (6) and Lewellan (18). Conner’s statement for DeFeo’s 1994 show at the Kohn Turner Gallery (cited in note 14) is, to date, the most comprehensive and insightful account of the connection between their relationship and her photo-collages of 1973. DeFeo also briefly describes their exchanges of the period in her 1988 interview with Solnit (Interviews for Secret Exhibition, Bancroft). I am grateful to Ms. Solnit for granting me access to her rich collection of recordings.
502 These details derive from Conner’s Kohn Turner essay and his correspondence with DeFeo.
503 Conner, letter to DeFeo, December 15, 1973, Bruce Conner photograph collection, Bancroft.
504 One could also read her addition of the specialty bulb as a play on the colloquial name of the ‘candlestick’ telephone. While the light bulb receiver makes the telephone a vehicle for insight, it also conjures the darker, surrealist image of the glass spike penetrating an ear.
support and direction by “encouraging her to look around her immediate environment . . . for subject matter.” Specifically, I assert that DeFeo’s production of photo-collages developed out of her and Conner’s joint myth making around The Rose, an activity which she construed as play. Their use of The Rose as a site for make-believe resonates, in several ways, with DeFeo’s conflation of the painting with memory: the two interpretations propose similar models of artistic invention because, in part, they both envision the jeopardized work as a creative catalyst.

According to Johan Huizinga’s famous description, play is a “well-defined quality of action which is different from ‘ordinary’ life.” Play offers a respite from our accustomed modes of dealing with the world by permitting a “certain degree of choice, lack of constraint from conventional ways of handling objects, materials and ideas.” This freedom is especially apparent in make-believe play when, as the renowned pediatric psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott explains, the pretending “child manipulates external phenomena” to conform to “inner or personal reality.” Sigmund Freud influentially interpreted imaginative play as a vehicle for wish fulfillment: “Unacknowledged, not yet achieved, or impossible wishes continue to find expression in play . . . ” as the child “uses objects and situations from the real world” but orders and alters them “in the way that pleases him best.”

According to this account, play serves the same purpose for children as daydreaming does for adults: it allows individuals to experience the feeling of mastering and resolving unpleasant or threatening events. As Huizinga summarizes, play “creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection.”

These defining qualities of play also characterize a portion of DeFeo’s correspondence with Conner in the early 1970s. In addition to long, dry letters detailing their frustrating dealings on behalf of The Rose, the friends exchanged notes, postcards, and telegrams that plucked the painting from its dreary reality and inserted it into fantastical scenarios. DeFeo, for example, invented this intentionally puerile fairytale for Conner in 1974: “This is the story: THE WHITE ROSE has moved to Happy Valley where the giant Pandas live and everyone eats as much ice cream and cake as they want. Rose is happy there and sends you best and fondest wishes and says not to worry. Rose eats well and gets plenty of rest.” She then sent him a postcard that corroborates this fanciful travel narrative:

---

505 Sussman, 6.
509 Millar, 148 and 25. Predictably, the quest to determine a purpose for play – an activity which is non-purposive by definition – has yielded wide-ranging and contradictory conclusions. Though later practitioners of play therapy, such as Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, would tweak and reject some parts of Freud’s theory, most analysts accept his basic assertion that play is a means of emotional recalibration.
511 Huizinga, 10. While most theorists regard play as an inherently creative activity, they have different opinions about the connection between play and artistic invention. While Huizinga (like Winnicott) views play as an expression of the fundamental creativity of human beings and thus as essential to engendering culture, contrary to Freud, he denies any direct connection between play and artistic creativity, especially involving the plastic arts. As I hope is clear, I do not apply the concept of play to DeFeo’s practice to demean it or characterize it as immature.
512 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, February 28, 1973, Jay DeFeo papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 908. She appears to have created this absurd tale in response to a letter in which Conner told the story of “Rose” in “Pandaland” (Bruce Conner, letter to Jay DeFeo, undated, Jay DeFeo papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 908).
Dear Bruce and Jay,

Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here.

love from Pandaland,

Rose

On the front of the card, she collaged a black-and-white photograph of a rose into the embrace of a diminutive, Technicolor gorilla (fig. 11). The montage’s humorous hodgepodge of incongruous objects, palettes, and scales makes it an appropriate pictorial analog to the preposterous message scrawled on its reverse.514

Like children contriving imaginary worlds through make-believe, the friends constructed their fables by mining their serious discussions about the painting and using the harvested contents to absurd ends. DeFeo’s anthropomorphization of The Rose into Rose, for example, transformed the disabused painting into a happily-ever-after princess with the efficiency of a fairy godmother’s wand. Both their work to conserve The Rose and their myths about it imagined a safe future for the endangered painting, but the latter magically resolved the anxieties, frustrations, and disappointments that burdened their real-life preservation efforts. The narratives, in other words, whimsically manifested the friends’ deepest desires for the painting and thus performed the therapeutic function that Freud attributed to play.515 A telegram that DeFeo sent Conner in 1974 further demonstrates how their mirthful exchanges with and about Rose held a funhouse mirror up to their business dealings around The Rose. It reads: “DEAR

513 Jay DeFeo, postcard to Bruce Conner, undated (early 1970s), Bruce Conner correspondence concerning The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

514 Since the montage also translates the story’s protagonist as a flower and the pandas as gorillas, it continues the process of metamorphosis enacted by the tale. The photograph of the rose was most likely taken by DeFeo. Plants, especially roses, were some of her favorite photographic subjects in the 1970s (Anne Wilkes Tucker, “When a Plant is Not a Plant,” Botanicals: Photographs from the 1970s (Santa Fe, NM: Dwight Hackett Projects, 2006), 37-39).

515 DeFeo’s inclusion of the line “Rose says not to worry” in her story speaks to this function. Another postcard that DeFeo sent Conner around 1973 indicates that she thought of collage as a method of exorcising her frustrations and disappointments about the painting (Jay DeFeo, collaged postcard to Bruce Conner, undated, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) (fig. 12). On the back of the card, she composed a note that expressed her indignation at the Oakland Museum’s mistreatment of her during their unfruitful, year-long negotiations over The Rose. She then pasted scraps of both a dollar bill and a drawing by Conner across the card’s back and front. The torn strips obscure swaths of her writing like black bars on a censored document, and they mauled the quaint portrait of a terrier on the front of the card with intimations of avarice. Before sending the postcard to Conner, she enclosed it in an envelope addressed to the Museum’s director in script that mocks his contrived and wildly illegible signature. In a note on the verso, she explained her motivations for the creation: “Bruce – This was never sent of course – little expressionistic games of this nature kept me relatively sane during all this.” By referring to her collage correspondence as “little expressionistic games,” DeFeo suggests that the activity provided a means of enacting desires that she could not act on in real life. As she points out, the card “was never sent of course.” Her confession that such “games” kept her “relatively sane during” her difficult dealings with the museum assigns the same purpose (i.e., emotional recalibration) to her collage practice that Freud assigned to play.
Like most of their exchanges at the time, the telegram takes the painting as its subject; however, the task that DeFeo charges Conner to perform converts his usual tedious and trying managerial duties into the frivolous and pleasurable activity of recounting “A SILLY STORY.” Huizinga’s definition of play as a liberating suspension of reality thus describes both the telegram and the action that it orders.

The salutation that DeFeo used on the telegram indicates that she and Conner were also subject to the transformative powers of their make-believe play. By addressing Conner as “TELEPHONE,” the missive confuses her interlocutor with the typical means by which they conversed. Such slippages abound in the artists’ light-hearted epistles; DeFeo almost always refers to herself and Conner using nicknames derived from the media or motifs of their recent discussions. He is “Telephone” and, occasionally, “Music-page” (an allusion to a drawing on staff paper which he sent DeFeo and which she, in turn, recycled into a photo-collage (fig. 9)). She goes by more varied pseudonyms, including “Telegram” (a nod to her proclivity for sending them), “Elephant” (a reference to her realization that “the Rose has become something of a white elephant to us all”), and “Drawing Board” (a declaration of her beginner’s mind following The Rose). By adopting these nonsensical identities, DeFeo and Conner entered the imaginary world that they constructed around The Rose. It is tempting to liken their use of nicknames to a game of dress-up, in which “the masked individual ‘plays’ another part, another being. He is another being.”

The artists’ excessive use of nicknames suggests that their antic exchanges also performed the social function of play. According to Huizinga, play fosters a sense of belonging because the “feeling of being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation, of sharing something similar to the rotating contents of a costume chest, the aliases assumed by DeFeo, Conner, and The Rose circulated unstably between them. Sometimes, for example, “Rose” referred to the painting and sometimes it referred to DeFeo – a transfer which mirrors the name’s uncanny blurring of object and subject.

The name’s uncanny blurring of object and subject is reflected in the rotating contents of a costume chest, the aliases assumed by DeFeo, Conner, and The Rose circulated unstably between them. Sometimes, for example, “Rose” referred to the painting and sometimes it referred to DeFeo – a transfer which mirrors the name’s uncanny blurring of object and subject.

---

516 Jay DeFeo, telegram to Bruce Conner, August 27th, 1974, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. A copy of this letter is also catalogued in the Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 908.

517 Some of her notes are little more than nonsensical strings of pet names, codes composed of inside jokes. For example, one of her Western Union dispatches reads: “Rose Sends Greetings to Telephone Love Telegram” (Jay DeFeo, telegram to Conner, 1974, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

518 In addition to the telegram cited above, DeFeo addresses Conner as “Telephone” in the following correspondence: DeFeo, telegram to Conner, 1974, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, Bancroft and Jay DeFeo, birthday card for Bruce Conner, undated, Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. She refers to him as “Music-page” in Jay DeFeo, birthday card for Bruce Conner, 1976, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

519 Jay DeFeo, letter to Irving Blum, undated (c. 1965), Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1945.

520 She names herself “Telegram” in DeFeo, telegram to Conner, 1974, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, Bancroft, and she calls herself “Elephant” in Jay DeFeo, card to Bruce Conner, undated, Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. She refers to The Rose as her white elephant in both DeFeo, letter to Blum, undated, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA and Jay DeFeo, letter to Thomas Albright, April 4, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Finally, she christens herself “Drawing Board” in Jay DeFeo, collaged card to Bruce Conner, undated, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

521 Huizinga, 14. For Huizinga, “The ‘differentness’ and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in ‘dressing up.’ Here the ‘extra-ordinary’ nature of play reaches perfection” (14).
important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms,
retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game."\(^{522}\) The “us versus them” mentality
cultivated by play finds expression in children’s secret clubs, coded languages, inside jokes, and
nicknames.\(^{523}\) By mimicking these exclusionary juvenile behaviors, DeFeo and Conner signaled
their solidarity around the Herculean task of ensuring The Rose’s future.

Through their correspondence, in sum, DeFeo and Conner carved out an intersubjective
space of play, which Huizinga famously called the “magic circle” where “an influx of mind”
infuses “the matter of the world.”\(^{524}\) The fantastical narratives that they spun around The Rose
and themselves inverted their current struggle to place and conserve the painting. Arguably,
however, their myth making was also integral to their real-life efforts as it helped cultivate the
emotional resources and solidarity required for their difficult task. At the very least, the friends’
imaginative exchanges interjected some much-needed levity into their angst-ridden crusade to
save The Rose. The fact that DeFeo occasionally incorporated photographs of herself and
Conner as children into her dispatches indicates that she consciously framed their interactions as
play. The jaunty invitation that she appended to a snapshot-cum-postcard of herself as a young
girl makes this association overt: “I am feeling better as you can see!! Can you come and play
next Friday? Your friend, J.D.”\(^{525}\)

To make the “for B.C.” collages, DeFeo drew on her correspondence with Conner,
culling not only its telltale tropes (such as the telephone) but also its playful qualities. She
attributed the same sense of fun and frivolity to making collages that she ascribed to her blithe
exchanges with Conner. As Constance Lewellan notes, she did not “take seriously her
photocollages of the early seventies; she once called them ‘after hours fun things.’”\(^{526}\) Like play,
hers “after hours” collages were “done at leisure, during ‘free time’,” when she wasn’t working
on larger scale paintings and drawings.\(^{527}\) According to Huizinga, the “only for fun” quality
attributed to play “betrays a consciousness of the inferiority of play compared with
‘seriousness’.”\(^{528}\) This attitude is reflected both in DeFeo’s dismissal of her collages as
superfluous to her oeuvre and in her characterization of their production as a break from creating
consequential works (i.e., paintings and drawings).

Like the fantasies that she and Conner crafted about The Rose, her photo-collages
mimicked the inventive appropriation of reality that characterizes make-believe play. One of the
simplest works in the “for B.C.” suite crystallizes this dynamic (fig. 14). It combines black-and-
white photographs of a leather golf bag and the modified telephone’s bulb-receiver on a sheet of

---

\(^{522}\) Huizinga, 13.  
\(^{523}\) Millar, 187.  
\(^{524}\) Huizinga, 11 and 4.  
\(^{525}\) Jay DeFeo, photograph postcard to Bruce Conner, undated, Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This collection contains two other examples of baby photos that DeFeo converted into postcards for Conner: a blanched snapshot of herself as a chubby and smiling toddler on which she wrote, “Hi Bruce – love from Mt. Olympus / love, J. DeFeo,” and a shot of Conner as a boy, to which she added a speech bubble that reads, “Art in Palo Alto.”  
\(^{526}\) Lewellan, 18. I do not believe that DeFeo’s characterization of her photo-collages as “after hours fun things” invalidates them as objects of art-historical inquiry. This assumption has quietly deflected attention away from the seemingly peripheral, social art practices that lay at the heart of this dissertation. I find the basic premise of Huizinga’s study – that the unseriousness of play makes it exceptionally revealing about human nature – especially helpful in counteracting this bias. I believe that the unseriousness of DeFeo’s collage practice makes them exceptionally revealing of her artistic practice and ideas about creativity.  
\(^{527}\) Huizinga, 8.  
\(^{528}\) Ibid.
black paper. The outsized receiver-hook sprouts from the upright bag’s right side, approximately where it would on a telephone. The collage is a blatant visual pun: it elides objects (bulb and receiver, golf bag and telephone stem) based on their formal resemblance with utter disregard to their function. As with a double entendre, humor arises from the unexpected association between incongruous elements, giving the montage a lighthearted, amusing tenor. By dislodging objects from their customary contexts and narratives of use and combining them according to alternative criteria, the collage demonstrates “the lack of constraint from conventional ways of handling objects, materials and ideas” that is indicative of play. The fact that the same objects (e.g., telephone, fan, stool, light bulb, etc.) reappear in different combinations throughout the series further likens her artistic process to a child’s inexhaustible invention of new significations for the worn contents of her toy chest.

As a technique that involves decontextualizing, fragmenting, and rearranging images, collage lends itself to representing the pretending child’s cannibalization of reality. Indeed, theorists often use terminology that evokes montage to describe make-believe play. Winnicott, for example, observes that children construct their imaginary worlds out of “fragments from external reality.” Freud adds rearranging to the process of worlding through play: “Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?” Although Freud compares the pretending child to the creative writer, his characterization of play as an inventive recombination of bits scavenged from everyday life vividly conjures the activities of the photo-monteur.

The golf-bag collage’s simple juxtaposition also performs the kind of partial metamorphosis achieved through imaginative play. The bag’s new appendage forces the viewer to perceive it as a telephone stem, yet the image never fully relinquishes its former identity: it flickers unstably between tote and telephone just as its prosthesis shuttles between bulb and receiver. The dual vision that the collage induces imitates the liminal state of make-believe. While the pretending child transforms the ordinary objects before him into the wondrous elements of his imaginary universe, he never fully relinquishes his hold on reality. As Huizinga explains, “The child is quite literally ‘beside himself’ with delight, transported beyond himself to such an extent that he almost believes he actually is such and such a thing, without, however, wholly losing consciousness of ‘ordinary reality.’” Each photo-collage approximates this “intermediate area of experience” by inviting viewers to perceive both the original identities of the objects represented in the hybrid image and the new entity suggested by

---

529 Lewellan’s description of DeFeo’s collages also makes this point: “Like Picasso in his found-object sculptures of the early thirties, DeFeo recognized the formal resemblances among things, irrespective of function, material or scale, and recombined them in inventive and often amusing ways” (19).

530 Millar, 13-14.

531 Winnicott, 51. Millar’s observation that imaginary play often evolves from “combining features out of their context” fits Winnicott’s characterization of make-believe as a montage-like activity (139).

532 Freud, 421.

533 In a statement from 1994, Conner characterized the transformations that DeFeo wrought through collage as fantastical and amusing: “The objects themselves obtained a controlled voice by association: a telephone could transform itself into a golf bag or a human figure or a flower, like a scene in a Betty Boop cartoon” (Conner, “A Conversation,” 233). By comparing the transformative nature of her collages to cartoon antics, he suggests that the works have a child-like quality.

534 Huizinga, 13-14. The fact that children playing pretend remain tethered to reality is widely acknowledged and distinguishes the experience of make-believe from psychotic hallucination.
their arrangement. This perceptual tug-of-war simulates "the precariousness that belongs to the interplay in the child’s mind of that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality)." In this way, the works prompt viewers to perform an act of imagination, inviting them into the "magic circle."

The simplicity of the golf-bag collage highlights its affinity with make-believe. As a distinct appended form, the receiver has the look of an accessory that the bag has donned to pretend to be a telephone, like an apron that a child has wrapped around her neck to "become" a superhero. As in a game of dress-up, only one out-of-the-ordinary item is needed to signal that the player (i.e., the bag) has transformed into another. The dramatic metamorphosis that DeFeo and Conner enacted simply by dropping the definite article from "The Rose" also demonstrated the creative efficiency of imaginative play. While other entries in the "for B.C." series are more elaborate than the golf-bag collage, they also represent masquerading objects. In one work, a cane chair and a display case pose as a light bulb, while a succulent impersonates DeFeo’s painting The Jewel (1958) in the background (figs. 15 and 16). In another, a photocopy of a drawing by Conner assumes the identity of a telephone/flower (fig. 9). These examples indicate that DeFeo often created multivalent images by combining montage juxtaposition with other mischievous methods of manipulation, such as doubling and silhouette.

In conclusion, viewing the "for B.C." series in the context of DeFeo and Conner’s fanciful correspondence suggests that the photo-collages model the production and reception of art on make-believe play. Although the frolicsome montages bear little formal resemblance to her earlier works from the 1970s that recycle Fillmore-era pieces, they offer a similar account of

535 Winnicott, 51.
536 Ibid., 52.
537 The conception of play as a kind of waking dream accounts for the collages’ resemblance to surrealist objects. These curious items generally brought together two or more familiar yet unassociated items, such as the fur pelt and tea setting coupled in Meret Oppenheim’s celebrated Object (1936). Such unexpected combinations were meant to mimic the psyche’s illogical manipulation of waking experience. The objects were supposed to shock the viewer by forcing her conscious mind to grapple with the kinds of unsettling distortions usually reserved for dreams. By simulating the liminal vision of the playing child, DeFeo’s montage works of 1973 similarly use juxtaposition to confuse internal and external experience. Her lamp-telephone assemblage is a surrealist object par excellence because it mixes incongruous objects to simultaneously humorous, ominous, and erotic effect. On the surface, her exchange of receiver for light bulb is merely amusing – a visual pun that confuses sound and sight. Like every good surrealist object, however, the amalgam is also disquieting; one cringes to imagine what would happen if the glass spike were brought into contact with an ear. Swapping the concave receiver for the elongated bulb also scrambles the telephone’s gender to erotic ends as the phallic flame now rests suggestively in its cradle. Her collages continue these themes in two dimensions. Their simulated mélange of the psychic and the sensorial often endow objects with an uncanny agency. It is difficult, for example, not to anthropomorphize, indeed sexualize, the telephone and shoe represented in fig. 17. The phone nestles in the hollow the shoe, its broken strap clasping the phallic form in an unmistakably erotic embrace. The phone’s gaping mouthpiece seems inquisitive and insistent probing the desolate environment beyond. Sussman similarly links DeFeo’s photo-collages to avant-garde precedents: “Adding to DeFeo’s personal interest in artistic morphology was her intellectual awareness of Dada photographs gendering and eroticizing industrial objects . . . .” (8).
538 Both of these techniques have a long history within avant-garde photography. As Rosalind Krauss notes, doubling was the most basic and indicative technique of surrealist photography (Rosalind Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism,” L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 28). Silhouettes breed the ambiguities inherent to representation because they reduce the information that an image conveys to its contour. They also provide an economical way to create interpenetrating images, as Sherry Levine exploited in her “Presidents” series of 1979. DeFeo often played with silhouette and framing to generate ambiguous spatial relations – confusion between positive and negative space and between figure and ground. Her collages also noticeably explore tonal contrast and repetition.
creativity. Each suite likens the process of aesthetic invention to modes of experience—make-believe and memory, respectively—in which consciousness permeates sensory perception, enacting a transformative, but fleeting, interpenetration of mind and matter, internal and external, absent and present. Unlike imagination, however, memory gives this dialectic a temporal dimension which conflates the internal and absent with the past and lost. This difference accounts for both the melancholic tinge to DeFeo’s earlier mixed-media works and its cession to pure glee in the collages from 1973.

Notably, DeFeo constructed both models of creativity from myths about The Rose. Her imaginative interpretation of The Rose as memory could be read as a prologue to the fairytale world that she and Conner constructed around the work; both endow the painting with properties and abilities that it does not possess, and, in doing so, both wish away the dire circumstances that the painting faced at the time. The later narrative, however, takes more liberties with the painting. By crafting an unmistakably fantastical account of The Rose, DeFeo and Conner self-consciously framed myth making as a means of wish fulfillment—a function which her earlier tale merely implies. Likewise, while DeFeo’s mnemonic account of The Rose may have been inspired by the work’s precarious situation, this circumstance demonstrably catalyzed her marriage of art and make-believe. Her playful exchanges with Conner, and the photo-collages that evolved from them, responded to the painting’s simultaneous presence and absence in their lives—to the way that it dominated their conversations, while remaining perilously and frustratingly distant from them physically. Their tales of Rose’s travels (to Happy Valley and Pandaland among other majestic spots) inverted the meaning of the painting’s separation from them, transforming it from a sign of impotence and danger into evidence of the work’s wellbeing.

The Angelic Hosts Return

DeFeo’s correspondence with Conner also demonstrated that imaginary worlds can be jointly constructed. In other words, their exchanges showed that play can inject an intersubjective dynamic into the transformative interpenetration of mind and matter, much as memory gives this experience a temporal dimension. Therefore, while DeFeo created mnemonically by bringing her past and present works into dialogue, it was possible for her to create playfully by bringing her own works and someone else’s into dialogue. By modeling her artistic process on play, in short, DeFeo opened the door to Fillmore-style collaborations—to producing works from interactions across not only time (between past and present) but also space (between self and other). A few of the “for B.C.” collages (such as fig. 9) restore this inter-author dynamic by incorporating fragments of photocopied drawings by Conner. Two years later, however, she began a series of collages that systematically appropriated her friend’s art.

The collages brought together her photographs with reproductions of two photograms from Conner’s “Angels” series (Sound of One Hand Angel (1974) and Sound of Two Hand Angel (1974)), which she borrowed from the announcement for his recent show at the Braunstein/Quay Gallery in San Francisco (figs. 18 and 19). Conner made each life-size photogram by posing

---

539 Huizinga observes that the illusory alliances of the “play-world” are characterized by “relativity and fragility” (11). Winnicott seconds this sentiment, adding: “The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself...” (47).

540 Conner frequently used photocopied artworks as stationary in the 1970s. It seems likely that DeFeo acquired the materials for her collages this way.
naked in front of a large sheet of photo-sensitive paper which his technical assistant, the photographer Edmund Shea, then subjected to a burst of bright light. Once developed, the areas of paper that were exposed to light turned black, while those that were blocked by Conner’s body turned varying shades of gray to white, depending on the proximity of his skin to the surface.\(^\text{541}\) He began to experiment with photograms the same year that DeFeo started her “for B.C.” series, and he turned to automatic photography for one of the same reasons that she turned to collage – to shake off artist’s block.\(^\text{542}\) He originally planned to use the silhouettes as templates for black velvet cutouts that he could carry around and unfurl like portable shadows to remind him of his creative impasse. He was so pleased with the results, however, that he decided to preserve the photograms as artworks in their own right, foregoing the translation from light to dark and paper to fabric. Instead of haunting emblems of stagnation and failure, they became angels – signs of transcendence and redemption.

Almost all of the twenty-four collages that DeFeo based on the series combine one of the two photograms reproduced on the announcement with cutouts from one or more of her photographs.\(^\text{543}\) Using cellophane tape, she affixed image fragments on top of Conner’s ghostly figure (fig. 20), and sometimes she cut around the contour of his form in order to slip her photographs partially or completely behind the photogram’s black background (fig. 21).

Through these methods, she used the reproduced photograms as supports and apertures for a variety of her photographs – from botanical and landscape images to depictions of the motley collection of objects (candlestick telephone, fragmented teacup, vacuum cleaner, etc.) that populated her studio. She also cannibalized her studio shots, extracting details of works in progress (such as the masking models for her Loop paintings) (fig. 22) and sections of her workspace to assemble around the photogram-scaffolds (fig. 23). She even combined Conner’s angels with photographs of artworks by another friend, Phyllis Rockne (figs. 24 and 25).\(^\text{544}\)

DeFeo’s angel collages exhibit many of the playful elements found in her “for B.C.” series. Like the earlier montages, which invert the contents of her and Conner’s serious dealings with The Rose, the angel works appropriate a material artifact of his public life as a professional artist and turn it into something private – an inside joke shared between friends.\(^\text{545}\)

---

\(^{541}\) Details of Conner’s production of the “Angels” series found in Peter Boswell, “Bruce Conner: Theater of Light and Shadow,” 2000 B.C.: The Bruce Conner Story Part II (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), 72. For a helpful general source about automatic photography techniques and their significance to avant-garde art see Experimental Vision: The Evolution of the Photogram since 1919 (Niwot, CO: Robert Rinehart Publishers, 1994). Conner began to make photograms soon after DeFeo’s experiments with cameraless photography. In 1973, she made a series of chemigrams, including Two Black Crows for Bruce Conner, which depicts her handprints. Conner also had a history of making art from indexes of his body. In 1965, he made Handprint using his blood as ink. He also used impressions of his hands and fingertips for Thumbprint (1965) and Prints (1974), both of which participate in his often subversive exploration of artistic identity. I would like to thank Leah Levy for pointing out these connections.

\(^{542}\) Judith Cizek discusses the circumstances around Conner’s creation of the photograms in her essay for the pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition “Angels: Bruce Conner 1973-1975,” which was held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern art in 1992.

\(^{543}\) There are some exceptions to this formula. She made several collages that only use cutout angels, and she created several works that combine cutout angels with drawn figures that imitate and expand on their forms.

\(^{544}\) DeFeo made four collages using photographs of two paintings by Rockne. While DeFeo took the photographs that she used to make the collages, the images are exceptional because they represent the work of another artist rather than something (a place, work, object, etc.) that is representative of DeFeo.

\(^{545}\) According to Conner, DeFeo offered the angel collages to him “as a gift,” but he asked her to keep them instead (Conner, “A Conversation,” 234). The way that DeFeo intended to use the angel collages thus harkens back to the Fillmore circle’s practice of privately circulating their artworks instead of selling them on the market.
perceived the reproduced photograms with the transformational vision of a pretending child. Two collages, for instance, imagine Conner as a telephone by appending both real and represented telephone parts to the slender, upright trace of his body (figs. 26 and 27). She even reversed this pretend play and dressed the phone up as Conner by wrapping a detail of her Loop painting around it like a stole to approximate the angels’ tapered forms (fig. 28). These works are visual analogs of DeFeo’s practice of nicknaming Conner; both conflate him with inanimate objects that were indicative of their friendship. Many of the angel collages (including the telephone works) also constitute visual puns since they combine Conner’s silhouette with disparate objects based on similarity of shape. Some of these formal associations are also conceptually amusing. For example, a partial vacuum cleaner covering Conner’s upper body both echoes the shape of his torso and appears to be responsible for sucking out his hollowed form (fig. 20). This implied narrative jokingly converts the otherworldly ethereality of his image into mundane vacancy. Furthermore, DeFeo’s studio logs show that she produced the series with the same exuberant experimentation that characterized her previous collage production (fig. 29). Mounted on her studio wall, the reproduced photograms resemble a troupe of paper dolls sporting two-dimensional costumes.

However, DeFeo’s angel series combines the playful techniques and aesthetics of her recent photo-collages with the intertextual dynamics of her Fillmore circle collaborations. Like her appropriation of Berman’s poster in 1965, her modifications both amplify and interrupt the formal language of Conner’s photograms. On the one hand, the collages exaggerate the way his ghostly figures confuse absence and presence by alternately treating the indexes as solid supports for her photographs and as windows through which to view them. Likewise, many of her manipulations heighten the ambiguity and multiplicity inherent in silhouettes. On the other hand, her collages multiply and miniaturize Conner’s unique and life-size works, and they pollute his pure, radiant angels with the mundane stuff of her everyday world. In other words, while the act of recycling Conner’s photograms reiterates the series’ hopeful narrative of creative rebirth, many of guises that DeFeo “dressed” his angels in are incongruous with their original mysterious and awe-inspiring manifestations.

By marrying DeFeo’s montage techniques of the 1970s with the distinctive methods of appropriation that she used in the Fillmore circle, the angel collages crystallize two main points of this chapter. First, the fluidity that the collages demonstrate between the community’s intertextual procedures and her artistic processes of the early 1970s suggests that she drew on the former to develop the latter. Second, the way in which the angel collages bring together

---

546 Figure 26 is likely the first collage that DeFeo made using Conner’s reproduced photograms. Notably, she labeled it as part of her “for B.C.” series.
547 The eighth frame of the contact sheet shows approximately a dozen modified photograms mounted on various backings and strung up in sloppy rows with other drawings and paintings. A couple of the temporary mounts hold two works, each of which incorporates the same photograph but oriented differently. For example, the two angels on the white sheet hold truncated vacuum cleaners, but one raises it horizontally across his chest to form a cross, while the other wears the vacuum vertically like a tunic. To their left, another pair rests on a dark background; they are identical except for the amount which the cutout photograph of a sinister cow skull pokes out from or rests behind the black outer contour that molds the figure. These examples suggest a serial process of permutation through recombination. Through this interplay of repetition and difference, the collages fed off of each other even as they materially cannibalized her photographs.
548 While this studio shot draws out the similarity between DeFeo’s angel collages and paper dolls, most of her collages buck this association. She rarely combined her photographs and Conner’s figures to resemble clothes on a body.
549 The fact that DeFeo used reproductions of the photograms to make her collages essentially ensured this effect.
Conner’s and DeFeo’s works – specifically, the fact that this interaction frequently blurs absence and presence and causes images to interpenetrate – indicates that she adapted the Fillmore circle’s dialogical style of making to accord with the liminal experiences of memory and play.

A note that DeFeo sent Conner in regards to the series further indicates that she thought about the interaction between their works in these terms. She wrote the note on a photocopy of a modified announcement for his “Angels” show (fig. 30). Cutout photographs of roses dapple the pair of reproduced photograms that flank information about the exhibition; blossoms wedge into the crook of one gracefully-tapered figure’s waist and between the outstretched hands of the other. In addition to these amendments, DeFeo scribbled a request, in looping cursive script, between the regimented lines of blocky type: “Send more vases! / love, Rose.”550 Read together, the note and collaged images identify the reproduced photograms as the sought-after “vases.”551 This conflation – which mirrors DeFeo’s subversive transformation of Conner’s angels into telephones – bears many hallmarks of their make-believe play. The fact that she signed the note with the name of her imaginary alter-ego, “Rose,” confirms that she viewed her request for more announcements and, by extension, the angel collages that she would produce from them as part of the friends’ longstanding game around The Rose.

While playful, her vase metaphor is far from frivolous and deserves elaboration. The vase’s functionality depends on the interplay between its physically substantial sides and bottom and the vacant center they surround. It therefore fits Martin Heidegger’s definition of the jug – a “thing whose essence is the void.”552 This interaction between presence and absence gives the vase its capacity to contain flowers by enabling the vessel to hold up blooms even as their stems penetrate it. If the vase is translucent, then this complex relationship is especially evident – then the container appears to support the blossoms that spring out of it, as would a pedestal, even as it molds and mediates the stems, as would a frame. The relationship between vase and flowers, container and contained, is multifarious not only perceptually but also conceptually. While the vase and the various flowers it contains remain an assemblage of distinct objects, they also amalgamate into something new – an arrangement.

The surprisingly rich vase analogy evidences how she thought about not only Conner’s photograms but also, I believe, her post-Fillmore practice in general. The metaphor indicates that DeFeo viewed the angels as containers for arranging not cut flowers, but cut photographs. It suggests, that is, that the photograms were useful to her because their liminal status (the fact that the indexes hover perceptually and materially between presence and absence) meant that they provided both a foundational structure for her collage compositions and an empty space for them to reside. In other words, the analogy implies that the angels’ apparitional appearance enabled them to spur DeFeo’s creative activity by inviting her to fill them as would the open mouth of a vase. The specific ways that she combined her photographs with Conner’s reproduced works support this reading. By using the photograms as both supports and frames for her images, the collages mimic the complex relationship between the vase and the flowers it contains, and they

550 Jay DeFeo, note to Bruce Conner, undated (c. 1975), Bruce Conner correspondence concerning The Rose, BANC MSS 98/32 c, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
551 Boswell and Cizek both echo DeFeo’s assessment of Conner’s angels, respectively referring to them as “vessel[s] of light” (74) and “vessel[s] of radiance.” The photograms lend themselves to DeFeo’s metaphor not only because they appear to be hollow but also because of their shape – which tapers to a point and then broadens like an elegant vase with a wide base.
foreground the intermediate status – the simultaneous presence and absence – that the angels share with vessels.553

I have argued in this chapter that DeFeo viewed The Rose in the early 1970s much as, according to the note, she viewed Conner’s photograms. By framing the painting as both her memory and imaginary friend, she endowed it with the mixture of absence and presence that she assigned Conner’s angels by referring to them as “vases.” As this chapter asserts, the liminality that she attributed to The Rose reflects the paradoxical relationship that she seems to have forged with the work as it wasted away in the SFAI; when the painting’s physical distance from her made it loom large in her thoughts, as she and Conner hatched plan after plan for its safe escape. Her conviction that the painting remained the “core” of her “creative universe”554 despite the fact that it was “in its decline”555 supports the idea that she viewed the work as simultaneously present and absent, vital and decrepit. I would like to extrapolate from the note’s indication that she found the liminality of Conner’s photograms to be creatively invigorating to suggest that she likewise saw The Rose as an effective creative catalyst because of, rather than in spite of, her paradoxical impression of it. Like a vase, that is, The Rose provided the ideal marriage of structure (i.e., formal and conceptual foundation) and space to spur artistic invention. In other words, it played a vital role in rebooting DeFeo’s practice by acting like a generative vacancy – a container for her and Conner to fill with fertile myths.

The vase analogy that DeFeo used to describe Conner’s photograms also resembles the metaphors of memory and make-believe that she used to conceptualize her creative practice in the 1970s. Like a vessel, both modes of experience are liminal: they are characterized by the interplay of absence and presence. Whether conjured by remembrance or imagination, the mind’s illusory images mold our perception of the tangible objects in front of us as the vase’s negative space shapes the flowers it holds. And, like the coming together of vase and flowers, the intermediate experiences of memory and make-believe produce precarious hybrids – transformative amalgamations of mind and matter that are both fleeting and unstable.556 Indeed, DeFeo’s angel collages are marked by a tension between part and whole that characterizes not only flower arrangements but also most of her montage works of the 1970s. Figure 21, for example, briefly coalesces into a landscape-figure only to dissolve into an angel-aperture and the vista it leads onto, much as Tuxedo Junction vacillates between the new work it constitutes and the old work it contains (fig. 8), and the simplest “for B.C.” photo-collage flickers between a telephone and a pretending golf bag (fig. 14).

I have argued throughout this dissertation that collaborative works produced in the Fillmore circle also exhibit this tension and that it is indicative of the community’s loose, even

553 While some of DeFeo’s collages use the reproduced photograms as either frames or supports, most use them as both by wedging photographs only partially beneath the black background so that they spill out of (and obscure) part of the figure’s contour, like flowers sticking out from the top of a vase.
554 DeFeo, letter to Conner, May 13, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning The Rose, Bancroft.
555 DeFeo, letter to Conner, October 27, 1972, AAA.
556 While they last longer than after images, cut flowers arrangements have long been symbols of ephemerality, as evidenced by their frequent appearance in vanitas imagery. DeFeo’s use of tape, rather than glue, to bind her angel collages also suggests impermanence. Walter Hopps notes that many of Conner’s works cultivate a feeling of contingency: “In terms of the work he made in Mexico, there is a kind of fragile quality to a lot of the materials he used; an almost fugitive quality – fugitive in the sense of being impermanent. Fabrics, cardboard, melted wax – these are vulnerable materials. And in his very best work he tends to use a lot of that, giving things a mellow, often rather dreamy surface – in the assemblages, the inkblots and also the Angels series of photograms, which are life-size versions of what Man Ray had done on a much smaller scale; silhouettes of objects on light-sensitive paper” (Walter Hopps, “Bruce Conner,” Bomb, Summer 2002, 10).
conflicted, collectivity. Since the angel collages developed out of DeFeo’s relationship with Conner, they could also be interpreted in this social light. In addition to mimicking the transformations that occur in perception when memory and make-believe fuse mind and matter, the collages could be read as performing the changes and ambiguities that occur to identity when relationship brings people together. Unlike most of the collaborative works produced in the Fillmore circle, however, the angel collages and many of DeFeo’s other works from the early 1970s foreground the interplay of absence and presence. In other words, they translate the push and pull between separation and belonging performed by her earlier collaborations with her friends into starker, more existential terms. It is certainly tempting to think that the Fillmore community’s dispersal was responsible, in part at least, for the way that she adapted its dialogical style of making to produce her own works after *The Rose*.

Another angel collage, which DeFeo sent Conner a photocopy of, reasserts the social dynamics of the collaborations that she took part in during her years on Fillmore Street (fig. 31). It suggests that even after the community’s dispersal she saw her appropriative montages performing the interpenetration not only of images and artistic practices but also of subjectivities. The montage uncharacteristically bypasses DeFeo’s photographs to combine the two photograms reproduced on the “Angels” exhibition announcement. It liberates the spectral figures from their cells on either side of the flier and joins them at the hip, imbricating their limbless and headless bodies. This union grants the angels the contact that they seem to yearn for through their pale, raised hands, which reach out to the viewer. In this way, the collage foregrounds the dialectic between isolation and contact that makes each angel’s solitary confinement – as well as the Fillmore circle’s collaborations – so poignant. While the silhouettes’ merge to form one broad body, their disparate shades distinguish them as separate entities. The angels merge to form a one that is two and a two that are one. Like all of DeFeo’s collages, their rendezvous performs the vagaries of intersubjective space – the destabilizing transformations of identity and being that occur when two people come together.

---

557 Boswell makes this observation about Conner’s photograms: “This yearning to make contact seems to be echoed in the white highlights of the *Angels*, those points where Conner actually touched the paper. It is as if the ghostly figures in the *Angels* are gesturing to the viewer to make contact with them . . .” (Boswell, “Theater of Light and Shadow,” 74).
Figure 1
Still from *The White Rose*
Bruce Conner
1967
Bruce Conner photograph collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 2
Still from *The White Rose*
Bruce Conner
1967
Bruce Conner photograph collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 3
Still from *The White Rose*
Bruce Conner
1967
Bruce Conner photograph collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 4
Contact sheet of DeFeo’s studio
Jay DeFeo
1976
9¾ x 8 inches
Jay DeFeo: Her Tripod and its Dress (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2003)
Figure 5

*After Image*

Jay DeFeo

1970

Acrylic and mixed media on paper

10 x 13 inches

Reproduced in *Jay DeFeo: Selected Works, Past and Present* (San Francisco: SFAI, 1984)
Figure 6

*The Rose*

Jay DeFeo

1958-66

Oil on canvas with wood and mica

128¾ x 92¼ inches

Digital reproduction from www.whitney.org
Figure 7
The Eyes
Jay DeFeo
1958
Graphite on paper
48 x 96 inches
Figure 8
*Tuxedo Junction*
Jay DeFeo
1965, 1972
Oil on paper mounted on three Masonite panels
48 ¼ x 32 ½ x 3⅞ inches (size of each panel)
Reproduced in *Jay DeFeo: Her Tripod and its Dress* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2003)
Figure 9

*Untitled (for B.C.)*
Jay DeFeo
1975
Photo-collage
9¼ x 7¼ inches
Figure 10
Birthday card for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
Undated (early 1970s)
Gelatin silver print mounted on cardstock with charcoal pencil writing
Dimensions unknown
Bruce Conner photograph collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 11
Collaged postcard for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
Undated (c. 1973)
Gelatin silver print mounted on a postcard
Approx. 4¼ x 5½ inches
Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 12
Collaged postcard for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
Undated (c. 1973)
Torn paper currency mounted on a postcard
Approx. 5½ x 4¾ inches
Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 13
Card for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
Undated (early 1970s)
Gelatin silver print mounted on cardstock with ink writing
Dimensions unknown
Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 14

*Untitled (for B.C.)*

Jay DeFeo

1973

Gelatin silver photo-collage

9 ¼ x 7 ¼ inches

Figure 15
*Untitled (for B.C.)*
Jay DeFeo
1973
Gelatin silver photo-collage
Dimensions unknown
Figure 16

*Untitled (for B.C.)*

Jay DeFeo

1973

Gelatin silver photo-collage

14½ x 7 inches

Figure 17
*The Jewel*
Jay DeFeo
1959
Oil on canvas
120 x 50 inches
Digital reproduction from www.jaydefeo.org
Figure 18
*Sound of One Hand Angel*
Bruce Conner
1974
Gelatin silver print photogram
87¾ x 41¼ inches
Digital reproduction from www.sfmoma.org
Figure 19

*Sound of Two Hand Angel*

Bruce Conner

1974

Gelatin silver print photogram

88 x 37 inches

Reproduced in *2000 B.C.: The Bruce Conner Story Part II* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999)
Figure 20

Untitled
Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print
9½ x 4 inches
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 21

*Untitled*

Jay DeFeo

c. 1975-76

Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print

9⅜ x 3⅞ inches

Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 22
Untitled
Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print
9½ x 4 inches
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 23

*Untitled*
Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print
9½ x 4 inches
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 24

*Untitled*

Jay DeFeo

c. 1975-76

Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print

9 x 4 inches

Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 25

*Untitled*

Jay DeFeo  
c. 1975-76  
Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print  
9 x 4 inches  
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 26

*Untitled (for B.C.)*

Jay DeFeo

1973

Collage of gelatin silver prints and the dial from Bruce Conner’s telephone mounted on a photomechanical reproduction

10⅞ x 4⅞ inches

Figure 27

*Untitled*

Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Collage of photomechanical reproduction and gelatin silver print
Approx. 9½ x 4
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 28

*Untitled*

Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Gelatin silver photo-collage
10 x 4½ inches
Digital copy courtesy of The Jay DeFeo Trust
Figure 29
Contact sheet of DeFeo’s studio
Jay DeFeo
1976
9¾ x 8 inches
Jay DeFeo: Her Tripod and its Dress (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2003)
Figure 30
Card for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
C. 1975-76
Photocopy of gelatin silver prints mounted on an exhibition announcement with ink writing
8½ x 11 inches
Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Figure 31
Card for Bruce Conner
Jay DeFeo
c. 1975-76
Photocopy of collage
8½ x 11 inches
Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
Conclusion

Around the time that DeFeo and Hedrick were evicted from 2322 Fillmore Street, she began to modify a souvenir program for the San Francisco Giants 1964 season. She extracted some images from the book to use in collages (such as the card that she crafted from Berman’s poster), but she also added images, mostly fragments culled from mass media sources and the collection of snapshots that she had accrued over a decade of living in the Fillmore neighborhood. Many of her additions highlight the montage aesthetic characteristic of the program’s original graphic design. The ragged photograph of a rose that she added to the cover, for example, appears to burst through the page like the irregular-edged photograph of Candlestick Park beside it (fig. 1). Some of her alterations appear to have been motivated by primarily formal concerns. As always, she delighted in the discovery of likeness in difference – in, for example, the similarity between the curve of her sunbathing body and that of a pitcher having just released the ball (fig. 2). Pages such as this not only foreground the amusing and surreal effects often produced when images are combined in this way; they also display a Kurt-Schwitters-like virtuosity for creating engaging compositions from paltry scraps of image and text.

Many of the pages also exhibit the sense of play that DeFeo would bring to her collage practice in the early 1970s. In an undated note on the back of the program, she couches her alterations in the same escapist terms she used to describe her collage making of the 1970s: “We did love baseball in those days – had a lot of fun doing stuff like this – a release from the strain of *The Rose*.” In moments from her personal life and incongruous references comically erupt into the book’s cheery fan universe. A chatting Mickey Mouse stands in for the Giants’ President in one photo (fig. 3), while, in another, DeFeo’s collaged head appears to react with surprise at having suddenly become a mother through montage (fig. 4). A series of stadium shots at the back of the program sets the stage for humorous play with scale and subject: she transforms Candlestick Park into a bullring (fig. 5) and Cincinnati’s Crosley Field into a site for mass voyeurism as a giant sunbathes in the outfield (fig. 6).

The light-heartedness continues in “The Players and Their Stories,” the section which DeFeo altered the most. She hijacked many of the pages devoted to individual players by replacing their faces with those of her friends. In this way, she conflated, for example, herself with catcher Del Crandell (fig. 7), Hedrick with third baseman Jim Davenport (fig. 8), and Joan Brown with “the tenacious and always competitive” pitcher Jack Sanford (fig. 9). The torn prints add dimensionality to the flat cutouts of the players and make the graft between athlete and artist far from seamless. Although DeFeo focuses on transforming the team members’ faces, some of her embellishments target their bodies. She gives herself an outsized right hand (its middle finger raised) and replaces Orlando Cepeda’s muscular physique with a centerfold’s curvaceous figure (fig. 10). This particularly outrageous montage exaggerates the incongruity that likely made the other modified player pages funny to DeFeo and her friends. I assume that much of the collages’ comedy is undecipherable without the group’s specific knowledge of both the painters and the players involved.

---

559 DeFeo appears to have borrowed the photograph of “the finger” gesture from Berman, who put it on a sign that he carried in the neighborhood Poet’s Parade in 1959 (*Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle*, ed. Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna (New York: D.A.P., 2005), back cover).
While DeFeo’s amalgamation of the Giants’ lineup with her circle of artist-friends was an inside joke, it was also (as is so often the case with her playful artistic endeavors) aesthetically rich and metaphorically meaningful. It is difficult not to read her likening of the Fillmore community to a team as an expression of the neighborhood’s collectivity – of a sense of belonging among the residents that had perhaps become more evident and significant to DeFeo as she prepared to leave them. It playfully Americanizes the kinds of togetherness, intimacy, and allegiance fostered in the bohemian group. The modified program also arguably likens her friends’ creative activities to the game of baseball. It suggests that art making had become, in certain respects, a team sport in the Fillmore neighborhood.

This dissertation has described some of the ways in which art practice acquired a collective dimension among DeFeo and her friends. Homing in on examples of collaboration that involved The Rose, I asked: How did the creative processes and works of different artists interact? What (to use DeFeo’s metaphor) were the “rules” of their “game”? How did period notions of the autonomous work, the individual artist, and expressionism change when the isolated studio became a “playing field” – when DeFeo’s production of The Rose became caught up in a network of social and creative exchanges with her friends? Finally, what type of “team” was the Fillmore circle? What ways of being together (i.e., styles of intersubjectivity and modes of association) did their collaborations perform?

DeFeo’s Giants collages speak to many of my findings. The dynamics of baseball – the way the ball is relayed between more-or-less stationary positions arrayed over a field – is analogous to the relational style of collaboration practiced by DeFeo and her friends. The game resonates, that is, with their habit of circulating works produced by a single artist (such as The Rose) between them via material appropriation, representation, and symbolic allusion – a process which embedded individual expression within dialogical transformation. The baseball metaphor also suggests the specific kind of intersubjective authorship modeled by these exchanges. The interplay that baseball enacts between the independence of each position and the interdependence of the team, between individual performance and teamwork, and between separation and connection was also performed by Fillmore artists as they put their discrete studio practices in conversation with one another. The commandeered Giants program manifests the sport’s reciprocity between the individual and the collective by allocating each player his own page. DeFeo’s montage modifications further highlight this dynamic by drawing much of their humor and formal interest from the revelation of unexpected likeness – from the discovery of similarity between disparate things (such as, the resemblance between her posture while sunbathing and that of an athlete throwing a baseball). Furthermore, the customized piece of memorabilia conjures the sociable tenor of the artists’ collaborations by using a leisure activity to allegorize their art making.

This study also situated the peculiar patterns of making and modes of authorship that developed in the Fillmore community within the context of American postwar art. An examination of the few exhibitions that presented DeFeo’s art to a national audience, I have suggested the ways in which her and her friends’ artistic practices resisted the reductive and ideologically-charged concept of the artist as individual, which was a popular trope, common to both high culture and its mass market echoes, in the United States during the Cold War. The

560 She may also have been inspired to fuse artists and ball players by the legendary baseball games played by San Francisco Art Institute faculty and students (including Hedrick) during the institution’s halcyon days of the late 1940s and early 1950s (Wally Hedrick, “di Rosa Artist Interview Series: Wally Hedrick,” interview by Leslie Goldberg, http://www.wallyhedrick.com/pdfs/di_rosa_artist_interview_series.pdf (2009)).
circle’s experimentation with forms of the artwork, artist, and creative act that allowed for reciprocation, relation, and dialogue and, thereby, performed a more nuanced (though by no means friction free) relationship between individuality and collectivism. Through this contextualization, my dissertation puts the Fillmore group in conversation with the many alternatives to modernism (as it was embodied by Abstract Expressionism) that were being proposed by American artists in the late 1950s. In other words, it recovers DeFeo’s contribution to the discussion about the direction of American art that played out in “Sixteen Americans.”

I have also attempted to craft an interpretive approach that recognizes and analyzes how deeply the artists’ collaborations were intertwined with their interpersonal interactions and relationships – a method which, consequently, speaks to not only the aesthetic implications of the artists’ exchanges but also the social work they performed. By examining networks of art objects within the social gestures that suffused their production and reception, this dissertation explored the complex and often elusive interplay between artistic making and micro-sociality, between aesthetic and social formation, that frequently occurred within the Fillmore circle. To avoid reductive biographical explanations, the last two chapters interpreted the personal details of the artists’ creative-social interactions through the conceptual frames (e.g., Kabbalism, play, memory, etc.) that the artists used to understand them.

Through this method, I have begun to uncover the complicated connections between the two aspects of the artists’ creative activity that DeFeo mentions on the back of the Giants program: their serious, individual (and even isolating) studio practices (arduous undertaking such as The Rose) and their “fun,” often collaborative projects (such as DeFeo and Conner’s imaginative correspondence about “Rose”). The relationship between the friends’ seemingly frivolous interactions and their creative production casts their predominantly convivial style of association – their focus on parties, friendly correspondence, and idle chatter – in a new light. Specifically, it suggests that the playful sphere of sociability allowed the Fillmore group to experiment with the relationship between identity and belonging – an issue of utmost seriousness in Cold-War-era America. This assertion accords with Georg Simmel’s idea that the sociable (which he defines as “association for its own sake”) is a largely symbolic space in which the foundational problem of society (“the measure of significance and accent which belongs to the individual as such in and as against the social milieu”) finds tenuous and figurative resolution.

561 For example, the conclusions of this study provide a foundation for situating the Fillmore artists’ practices in relation to Allan Kaprow’s proposition that art after Jackson Pollock should “blur art and life” (Allan Kaprow. Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life (1958; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1-9). How do the ways that DeFeo and her friends’ enacted this avant-garde proposal compare to Kaprow’s likewise playful but more performative happenings? One could argue that DeFeo’s Giants collage asserts that her circle “plays” on the national stage of American art, even as they represent San Francisco.

562 I believe that acknowledging the contributions of West Coasts artists to this cultural debate, from which they are often assumed to have abstained, will help construct a richer narrative of postwar art by bringing to light proposals for art practice that exceed and evade the terms (such as, modernism and postmodernism) that typically structure accounts of this transitional period.

563 Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Sociability,” trans. Everett C. Hughes, American Journal of Sociology, November 1949, 254 and 255. I do not mean to imply that interactions between members of the Fillmore community were purely sociable. Since they were good friends, personal content no doubt pervaded the artists’ social exchanges, making them not strictly sociable in Simmel’s definition of the word. It is worth noting that Simmel’s theory that convivial exchanges present symbolic solutions to the problem of balancing the individual’s needs with those of society gained renewed importance in postwar America, when the Cold War made this issue a subject of national debate. His interpretation of sociability was foundational to the symbolic-interactionist approach.
At the very least, the reciprocity between artistic and social formation in the Fillmore circle suggests that its emphasis on the sociable was more than a West Coast bohemian counter to the seriousness of the New York art world or a release from the strain of art making.

By engaging the interpersonal context of art practice in the Fillmore neighborhood, this dissertation contributes to a recent wave of scholarship that attempts to craft a more subtle account of art’s relationship with and contribution to modern society by scrutinizing its private face – the way groups of artists have conspired to not only shock the public but also use the spaces and activities of art to forge alternative subjectivities and relations. This line of inquiry was inspired, in part, by the trend among artists in the last two decades to use interaction as an aesthetic medium. Contemporary works that stage social situations (between gallery-goers, specific communities, or the artist and the public) have provided a new lens through which to view older avant-garde practices, which were still rooted in the object and the studio. Specifically, these works have given scholars (myself included) the inspiration and tools to examine the micro-sociality of artists’ collectives – to see beyond how their art combated society to how it crafted imaginative modes of being together. Because the Fillmore circle is poised chronologically between the moments of studio and post-studio practice, understanding it could help construct a long history of the “social turn” in art – a narrative which traces the significance of interpersonal interaction to creative production from modernism through the present.

In the future, I hope to use the interpretive approach modeled by this dissertation to gain a fuller understanding of the Fillmore community’s art practices than I have been able to give here. My tight focus on DeFeo’s interactions with Berman and Conner around The Rose was strategic. It enabled an in-depth look at her simultaneously creative and interpersonal relationships with two artists whom she once identified as her “soul mates.” However, the necessarily narrow scope of this study left many instances of collaboration in the circle unexplored. For example, I would like to examine the conversation between DeFeo’s and Hedrick’s art that evolved (across a great stylistic chasm) over the decade that the couple lived at 2322 Fillmore Street. Burchard’s (possibly staged) photograph of the couple’s shared studio (fig. 11) and two paintings by Hedrick that make wry formal and iconographic references to his wife’s art (figs. 12 and 13) suggest the richness of this topic. DeFeo’s artistic and personal relationships with her female neighbors (especially Sonia Gechtoff and Brown, who consecutively occupied the studio next to DeFeo’s) are equally worthy of research. By accruing knowledge of specific collaborations between Fillmore artists, I hope to develop a more precise and nuanced picture of this fluid community and the reasons why their art practice developed the distinctive dynamic sketched in this dissertation.

I would also like to give a more detailed account of the gender dynamics of the artists’ exchanges. As chapter three’s discussion of DeFeo and Berman’s photographs demonstrated, to sociology that developed at the University of Chicago after World War II. The fact that the department published a translation of Simmel’s 1910 speech “The Sociology of Sociability” in its journal (as cited above) evidences this influence.

The broad category of art practice that I describe here goes by many names, including art as social practice, relational aesthetics, social works, and conversation pieces.

Jay DeFeo, interview by Rebecca Solnit for the book Secret Exhibition, Phonotape 4000 C: 8, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

DeFeo’s modified Giants program excludes some prominent “players” in the Fillmore community, notably Berman and Conner. These omissions indicate that defining her fluctuating, casual circle of artist-friends is a difficult task. As noted in chapter three, DeFeo’s inclusion of scraps from the program on the card that she made from Berman’s poster may have been a way of including him in the Fillmore “lineup.”
some of their collaborations cited traditional gendered structures of artistic production (such as, the male artist and the female model). Rather than replicating these structures, however, Fillmore artists’ usually took them up in ways that confused and complicated expected gender relations. DeFeo’s characterization of her relationships with Berman and Conner alludes to the group’s play with the gendered terms of artistic creation. Her portrayal of their relationships also accords with the mixture of distance and communion, solitude and contact, described in this dissertation:

Through nobody’s fault but my own, I pretty much maintained a solitary existence, but Wally [Berman], Wallace, was probably closer to me than anybody. And, there was a quality about Wallace that always made me feel a bit shy, maybe because he was pretty much the same. I never got THAT close to him, but theoretically Wallace and I were very, very close. I think as soul mates more than anything. Like Bruce, in many ways, I had a kind of identification; let’s say as a soul mate kind of thing with both of them in different ways, but sort of at a distance you know. I guess mainly an old hackneyed term would be kind of like a muse, maybe, but they both kind of fed my imagination, and I’d get a little something in the mail from Wallace or a little something from Bruce and I would creatively respond to it. Either in some funky way or you know in a larger way as far as my work was concerned.

It is notable that DeFeo struggles to label her simultaneously interpersonal and creative relationships with the men, settling on the terms “soul mate” and “muse.” By identifying male artists as her muses, DeFeo reverses the term’s typical gender and complicates the notion that she and *The Rose* inspired male Fillmore artists, a process which, at times, may have objectified or exploited her.

I also hope to build on the understandings of *The Rose* proposed here. The painting is, in many ways, the generative vacancy at the heart of this study, much as it was for DeFeo’s art practice in the 1970s. As outlined in the introduction, I had to deflect my research from *The Rose* to works produced around it because (amazingly) the painting still poses many logistical challenges to public exhibition. The painting’s inaccessibility was formative to the relational approach I have taken in this study. However, the dialogue between *The Rose* and the works analyzed in this dissertation would be enhanced if details about the painting’s materiality, form, and process were factored into it. Indeed, by expounding the social, ideological, and aesthetic uses to which *The Rose* was put during and immediately following its production, this dissertation prompts the following, as yet unanswerable, question: Is the painting’s exceptionalism (its extremitity as an object and process) due, in part, to the uncommon conditions of its production – in particular, to the entanglement of DeFeo’s painting process with the lives, relationships, and creative practices of her community?

Thankfully, changing conditions will soon allow me to address this question. *The Rose* will return to San Francisco as part of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s landmark DeFeo retrospective, which is scheduled to open in November 2012, and the Museum’s construction of a new building designed by Renzo Piano, set to open in New York’s Meatpacking District in 2015, will provide a permanent exhibition space for the painting. These exhibitions will finally

567 DeFeo, Solnit interview, Bancroft.
568 Unfortunately, the exhibition and its catalog debut too late for me to engage them in this dissertation.
allow gallery-goers and scholars (myself included) to grapple with *The Rose* as an art object and to assess its place in the narrative of postwar American art.\(^{569}\)

To be sure, the present is an exciting time for DeFeo scholarship. The perpetual visibility of *The Rose* in the Whitney’s new museum will undoubtedly prompt a flurry of innovative interpretations of the painting that are bound to revise currently accepted notions about her art. The renewed focus on DeFeo is part of a gathering interest, mostly among young art historians, in the art of postwar San Francisco.\(^{570}\) As discussed above, I believe that this development stems in part from the fact that much of the art produced in the city in the decades following World War II speaks in oblique yet pertinent and revealing ways to the art of today. Additionally, the popularity of this art might be due to the fact that it reverberates with our moment not only culturally but also politically. The relationship between the self and society is still an extremely divisive issue in American politics. The current, often intractable, divide between the Right and the Left (e.g., the Tea Party and the Occupiers) over issues such as the distribution of wealth, health care, and corporate identity stems, in large part, from a disagreement over the proper relationship between personal freedom and the collective good. Is the former guaranteed by ensuring the latter or the other way around? How do we even define these terms (e.g. is a corporation an individual entitled to the rights of personhood)?

Unfortunately, the debates over such questions that play out in national politics and the media only acknowledge a few simplistic possibilities for the relationship between the individual and the collective. In this way, the ideological landscape of the United States in the twenty-first century is startlingly reminiscent of the mid-twentieth century, when Cold-War fears prompted politicians, writers, and academics (among others) to portray American society as polarized between individualists and conformists (e.g., inner- and other-directed people, capitalists and communists, and Beats and Squares).\(^{571}\) Art practices, like those of DeFeo and her friends, that model modes of being together that circumvent or short-circuit dogmatic conceptions of the relationship between self and society may not have the power to directly change American politics. However, by demonstrating that there are possibilities for co-existence beyond the narrow and unsatisfactory options offered by current political discourse, these “social works” inspire us to envision a different shared future – a future in which we might share differently.


\(^{570}\) Evidence of the swelling scholarly interest in the art of postwar San Francisco includes Kevin Hatch’s recent monograph on Bruce Conner, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), and two dissertations that are currently in progress, Tara McDowell’s *Image Nation: The Art of Jess, 1951-1991* (University of California Berkeley) and Anastasia R. Aukeman’s *The Rat Bastard Protective Association: Bruce Conner and His San Francisco Cohort, 1958-68* (City University of New York).

\(^{571}\) This historical affinity is strikingly evident in the current Republican vice-presidential candidate’s past acknowledgement of Ayn Rand’s neoliberal novel *Atlas Shrugged*, which was first published in 1957, as foundational to his ideological vision (Paul Krugman, “Galt, Gold and God,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2012, A25). The political resonances between our moment and the postwar period may also be partly responsible for the current pop cultural fascination with the late 1950s and early 1960s, as evident, for example, in the popularity of the AMC drama series *Mad Men* and mid-century modern décor.
Figure 1
Program for The San Francisco Giants’ 1964 season with collage additions
Jay DeFeo
c. 1965
8 ½ x 10 inches
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 2
ALL IN AGREEMENT: The Giant pilot chats with Juan Marichal and President Horace Stoneham on the day Marichal reported for 1964 spring training at Phoenix.

SOCIAL INTERLUDE: Ladies’ Day at the Bootees’ Club, when Mrs. Duck and Mrs. Jimmy Darasport were the guests of honor at one of the club’s mid-season luncheon parties.
1964 Training Camp Vignettes

OPENING DAY: Dignitaries attend the St. Louis exhibition opener at Phoenix. From left to right they are Governor Paul Fannin of Arizona, Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick, Warren G. Ein, President of the National League, and Pepper Martin, President of the Giants.

SCHOOL DAYS: The youngsters would rather be out at the ball field at Casa Grande, but Mrs. "Chuck" Hitter and Mrs. Billy Pierce insist that school books must come first.

DAD GETS A SMILE: The daily workout is over and here is young "Scotty" Larsen welcoming his dad back to the family fold.
WHERE THEY PLAY

Candlestick Park—Capacity 42,500
Distance from plate to right field: 315
Distance from plate to left field: 315
Distance from plate to center field: 420

NEW YORK Polo Grounds—Capacity 33,500
Distance from Plate to Right Field: 30
Distance from Plate to Center Field: 469
Distance from Plate to Right Field:

MILWAUKEE County Stadium—Capacity 49,760
Distance from plate to right field: 310
Distance from plate to left field: 310
Distance from plate to center field: 410

LOS ANGELES Dodger Stadium—Capacity 56,600
Distance from Plate to Right Field: 310
Distance from Plate to Center Field: 410
Distance from Plate to Left Field: 310

Figure 5
Figure 6
Del Crandall (9)

Another of the great baseball "names" wears a Giant uniform this year, as the leg-limited DEL CRANDALL takes over his share of the responsibilities at Candlestick Park. For the past decade and more he has been regarded as the National League's No. 1 receiver, the annual choice for the All-Star game and team. A colorful personality and an inspirational force on the field, he has enjoyed national popularity, a player all baseball fans know and talk about. A long ball and destructive hitter, he was one of the key players in Milwaukee's pennant years; and a winning force through all his career. Defensively he has been just about in a class by himself, a tactician in his handling of pitchers; and without flaw in the catching mechanics.

The Giants acquired Del in the multi-player trade with Milwaukee during the past winter. Now thirty-three years old and a native Californian, he has been playing in the majors since 1949 when he joined the Braves in Boston. A life time batting average of .266 is pointed up by a career total of 170 home runs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>2B</th>
<th>3B</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>PCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Evansville</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>.220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-52</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7
Jim Davenport (12)

The 1964 season may throw the style and playing skills of JIMMY DAVENPORT into even wider focus, in that he campaign may present him for at least some of the time at second base. The range and sure handed play that identified him as the league's All-Star third baseman over the past two years, could carry him to new heights at the new position. A supreme stylist, he makes the big play, always.

A freshman member of the first creation of San Francisco Giants, Jimmy has been a great popular favorite through his years at Candlestick Park. In turn San Francisco has become his favorite city; a native Alabaman, Jimmy now makes his home here with his family.

In the Giant organization since 1955. He moved up fast from the Class D El Dorado—where incidentally he played side by side with Jose Pagan—through Dallas and Minneapolis, to San Francisco in 1958.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>2B</th>
<th>3B</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>RBT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The winningest pitcher San Francisco fans have seen at Candlestick Park is the tenacious and always competitive JACK SANFORD. In his five seasons as a Giant, Jack has won eighty games, forty of them through the last two campaigns. He notched 24 as the Giants drove to the pennant in 1962, and he added sixteen more last year.

That has been the pattern of his pitching ever since he entered the National League at Philadelphia in 1957. He won nineteen games as a freshman to win the "Rookie of the Year" award, and he's been doing forward ever since. Actually he pitched more innings last year than in any previous season, 284, though he has worked two hundred or more in six campaigns. As they say, Jack comes to the ball park to play, and to complete the rhyme, to earn his pay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>SO</th>
<th>BB</th>
<th>ERA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Dover</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9
Orlando Cepeda (30)

Now 26-years-old, and a six year veteran of the National League wars, ORLANDO CEPEDA is no longer a "boyish" ball, but his strength and savage force when the glove puts a bat in his hands, is in no sense diminished. He is one of the game’s authentic power hitters, and in his own thinking that his best years are still ahead of him.

To bring those hopes to fulfillment he'll have to shoot at targets rigged high. Already in his time in San Francisco, he has been the National League "Rookie of the Year," its home run champion, and also it's R.B.I. top man. The 1963 season was well up to these standards. He whacked 34 homers and drove 97 runs plated.

A native Puerto Rican, the popular Orlando came into the Giant organization in 1955, and played at Kokomo, St. Cloud and Minneapolis on the way to San Francisco. He failed to hit .300 only once through his career, and then only by three points, at .297 in 1960. His .309 career average was put together with 1,105 hits, 191 of them home runs in six seasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>2B</th>
<th>3B</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>AVG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Kokomo</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>StCloud</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10
Figure 11
Wally Hedrick painting at 2322 Fillmore Street with The Rose in the background
Jerry Burchard
1959
Gelatin silver print
Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1645
Figure 12

_J., Me et Cat_

Wally Hedrick

1954

Painting (exact medium unknown)

Dimensions unknown

Reproduction courtesy of The Estate of Wally Hedrick
Figure 13

*Life Game*

Wally Hedrick

1957

Painting (exact medium unknown)

Dimensions unknown

Reproduction courtesy of The Estate of Wally Hedrick
Bibliography

Books and dissertations


Exhibition catalogs


Essays, articles, and reviews


Cross, Miriam Dungan. “Shocking ‘Beat’ Art Displayed.” *Oakland Tribune*, 29 November 1959, 4C.


“In a Second Revolution the New Role for Culture.” Life, 26 December 1960, 45.


Electronic resources


Archival materials

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

American Federation of Arts records, 1895-1993

Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979)

Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976

Dilexi Gallery records, 1957-1971

Sonia Gechtoff papers, 1957-1980

Wally Hedrick papers, 1954-1974

Fred Martin papers, 1949-1975
Hans Namuth photographs and papers, 1952-ca.1985

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s *The Rose*, BANC MSS 98/32 c

Bruce Conner papers, BANC MSS 2000/50 c

Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069

Michael McClure notebooks, BANC MSS 2000/50 c

The Jay DeFeo Trust, Berkeley

Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

The Dorothy C. Miller Papers, I.15.i

Photographic Archives

National Archives, College Park, Maryland

Records Relating to the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition, 1956-1959

Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California

Jay DeFeo file

Oakland Museum of California, Oakland

Jay DeFeo file

San Francisco Art Institute Archives, San Francisco

Art Bank file

Jay DeFeo file

Wally Hedrick file


“Beat Culture” file

Jay DeFeo file

Interviews and talks


Solnit, Rebecca. Interviews for the book *Secret Exhibition*, Phonotape 4000 C: 1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
Appendix: Timeline of Jay DeFeo’s dealings with The Rose, 1965-74

September 30, 1965: Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick are officially notified of their eviction from 2322 Fillmore Street.

November 9, 1965: Acting at the behest of Walter Hopps, director of the Pasadena Art Museum (PAM), a Bekins moving crew removes The Rose from 2322 Fillmore Street and ships it to PAM for exhibition. Bruce Conner films the proceedings.

January 4, 1966: DeFeo and Hedrick separate. DeFeo travels to Pasadena to work on The Rose, which is being housed in a storage room at PAM. She remains for approximately three months, staying in Hopps’ house. An illness and her increasingly complicated relationship with the Museum’s administration prompt her departure.

Spring, 1966: DeFeo moves to a house in Ross, California, a small town in Marin County approximately thirty miles north of San Francisco. She describes her new home to a friend: “I have a beautiful acre of wild garden to peruse through the glass wall of my little tree house. My living quarters are all I could desire as a single girl.”

DeFeo resumes teaching part-time at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI).

February 4-March 2, 1969: The Rose is shown at PAM. The three-year delay was due, in part, to Hopps’ departure from the museum in 1967.

April 1-May 25, 1969: The Rose is shown at the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA). It is exhibited against a black wall.

Summer, 1969: The Rose is moved to SFAI, the final venue on its exhibition schedule, where it is shown in the McMillan Conference Room.

DeFeo’s divorce is finalized. She moves from Ross to Larkspur, another small town in Marin County, where she shares a house with John Bogdanoff.

---

572 This timeline is based on Judith Dunham, “Chronology,” Jay DeFeo and The Rose, ed. Jane Green and Leah Levy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 155-68. Entries without footnotes are based on Dunham’s chronology rather than my own research.

573 DeFeo describes the debilitating flu-like illness she contracted during her third week in Pasadena in a letter to Fred Martin (Jay DeFeo, letter to Fred Martin, February 10, 1966, Jay DeFeo papers, 1948-1976, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 1128). The Museum’s rocky finances and rumors that Hopps might leave his post appear to have strained her tenure at PAM (Jay DeFeo, letter to Irving Blum, undated, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 1645).

574 Jay DeFeo, letter to David Simpson, undated, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 2673.

575 Documentation in Jay DeFeo’s file in the San Francisco Art Institute Archives shows that she intermittently taught drawing, painting, and mixed-media classes from 1964 to 1971.

576 James Demetrion, who became director of PAM after Hopps, notes his predecessor’s departure in a letter to DeFeo (James Demetrion, letter to Jay DeFeo, September 28, 1967, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 2678). Demetrion and DeFeo’s correspondence between 1965 and 1968 records the Museum’s many failed attempts to schedule The Rose’s exhibition.

1970: DeFeo resumes making art after a four-year break following her completion of *The Rose*. She describes the process as “a difficult new beginning after such a stretch of non-doing.”

Spring 1971: SFAI does not renew DeFeo’s teaching contract. Wanting to distance herself from the school and in need of income, she begins to ponder finding a permanent home for *The Rose*. Anxiety over the painting’s condition also prompts her plans to make “‘My Life and Times at the Art Institute’ a closed chapter in the Rose Diary!” “How long can I risk leaving the painting unprotected at the Institute?” she asks a friend. “The last time I saw it at the Institute . . . it was standing with two or three brooms and mops leaning against it!”

DeFeo enlists Conner to help her place the painting. For the next three years, he pursues possible buyers and coordinates conservation efforts.

April-May 1971: DeFeo tries to arrange for *The Rose* to be moved to the Oakland Museum of California as either a loan or a purchase. Negotiations ultimately fall through, disappointing DeFeo. “Sometimes I get so frustrated rallying behind boys in the front lines,” she vents to a friend. “I’d like to get right out there and attack the Board of Directors like a one-man battalion . . . (down, girl.).”

February 1972: Expressing admiration for Conner’s “Madison Avenue tactics,” DeFeo asks him to negotiate a final sale of *The Rose*. She promises to cut him a percentage. Conner agrees: “I would like to try to sell the painting . . . My own anxiety in the process can’t compete with what I am sure you have to cope with. I can help insulate and direct the activities with less disturbance to myself than what you would have to go through.”

November 1972: Thornton (Tony) Rockwell, chief conservator at the San Francisco Museum of Art, evaluates *The Rose* and proposes a two step treatment plan.

Conner screens his film *The White Rose* at SFAI to arouse interest in the painting.

1973: DeFeo wins an Individual Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She allocates $1,500 to conserve *The Rose* and uses the rest to purchase a camera and set up a darkroom. DeFeo writes to Conner: “[I] hope all parties concerned have the understanding that the 1500 is really the last drop I can give to the Rose – after that the remainder will simply have to be a matter of donations – even if it takes a long time. . . .”

---

578 Jay DeFeo, “Biography of Jay DeFeo,” 1975, Jay DeFeo’s Artist File, The Oakland Museum of California.
579 Jay DeFeo, letter to Terry St. John, April 28, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning Jay DeFeo’s *The Rose*, BANC MSS 98/32 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
581 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, May 29, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.
582 Jay DeFeo, letter to Thomas Albright, May 30, 1971, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.
583 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, February 1973, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.
584 Bruce Conner, letter to Jay DeFeo, February 28, 1973, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 908.
585 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, November 1972, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.
586 Ibid.
587 Jay DeFeo, letter to Bruce Conner, September 10, 1974, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 908.
March 7, 1973: DeFeo contacts her old patron Patrick Lanaan to gauge his interest in purchasing *The Rose.*

May 21, 1973: DeFeo and Conner organize a fundraiser to conserve *The Rose.* The event, titled “WAKE to the Memory of *The Rose* by Jay DeFeo,” is held at SFAI. *The White Rose* (1967) is screened. Nineteen people attend, including Fred Martin, Bruce and Jean Conner, Al Wong, Peter Selz, and Suzanne Foley.

Dick Reisman donates the final $500 needed to pay for the first stage of Rockwell’s conservation plan.

May 23, 1973: Conner hatches a scheme to expedite the second half of Rockwell’s plan. He proposes a “conservation exhibition” to Foley, who is a curator at SFMA. According to the proposal, *The Rose* would be on display at the museum during its conservation. Conner predicted that this demonstration would attract enough donors to raise the $10,000 needed to complete the painting’s restoration. The museum ultimately rejects Conner’s proposal.

July 1973: Rockwell begins treating *The Rose.*

December 15, 1973: Conner proposes a payment plan for his service on behalf of *The Rose*: “My pay as far as the ROSE. I would like to receive from you [DeFeo] a work of yours each (this) year” and “I get 10% of sales price of ROSE in exchange for past activity in behalf of the ROSE and future (if any) activity.”

May-July, 1974: Rockwell’s team completes the first stage of conservation, which involves stabilizing the painting’s surface and encasing it in a protective coat of wire and plaster. Conner describes the process: “Right now [*The Rose*] looks like an even stranger transmutation. Becoming a mummy wrapping, plaster wall, chrysalis . . . .”

Due to a lack of funds, the second stage of conservation never begins. With the immediate goal of protecting *The Rose* addressed, DeFeo and Conner cease efforts to place the painting. It remains walled into SFAI’s McMillan Conference Room until 1993.

---

588 Jay DeFeo, letter to Patrick Lannan, March 7, 1973, Jay DeFeo papers, AAA, reel 908.
589 Attendance registry for “WAKE to the Memory of *The Rose* by Jay DeFeo,” Jay DeFeo’s file, San Francisco Art Institute Archives.
590 Bruce Conner, letter to Tony Rockwell, May 23, 1973, Jay DeFeo’s file, San Francisco Art Institute Archives.
591 Bruce Conner, letter to Suzanne Foley, May 23, 1973, Jay DeFeo’s file, San Francisco Art Institute Archives.
592 Bruce Conner, letter to Jay DeFeo, December 15, 1973, Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. It is unclear whether DeFeo agreed to his terms.
593 Bruce Conner, letter to Elizabeth Wendt, undated, Bruce Conner correspondence concerning *The Rose*, Bancroft.