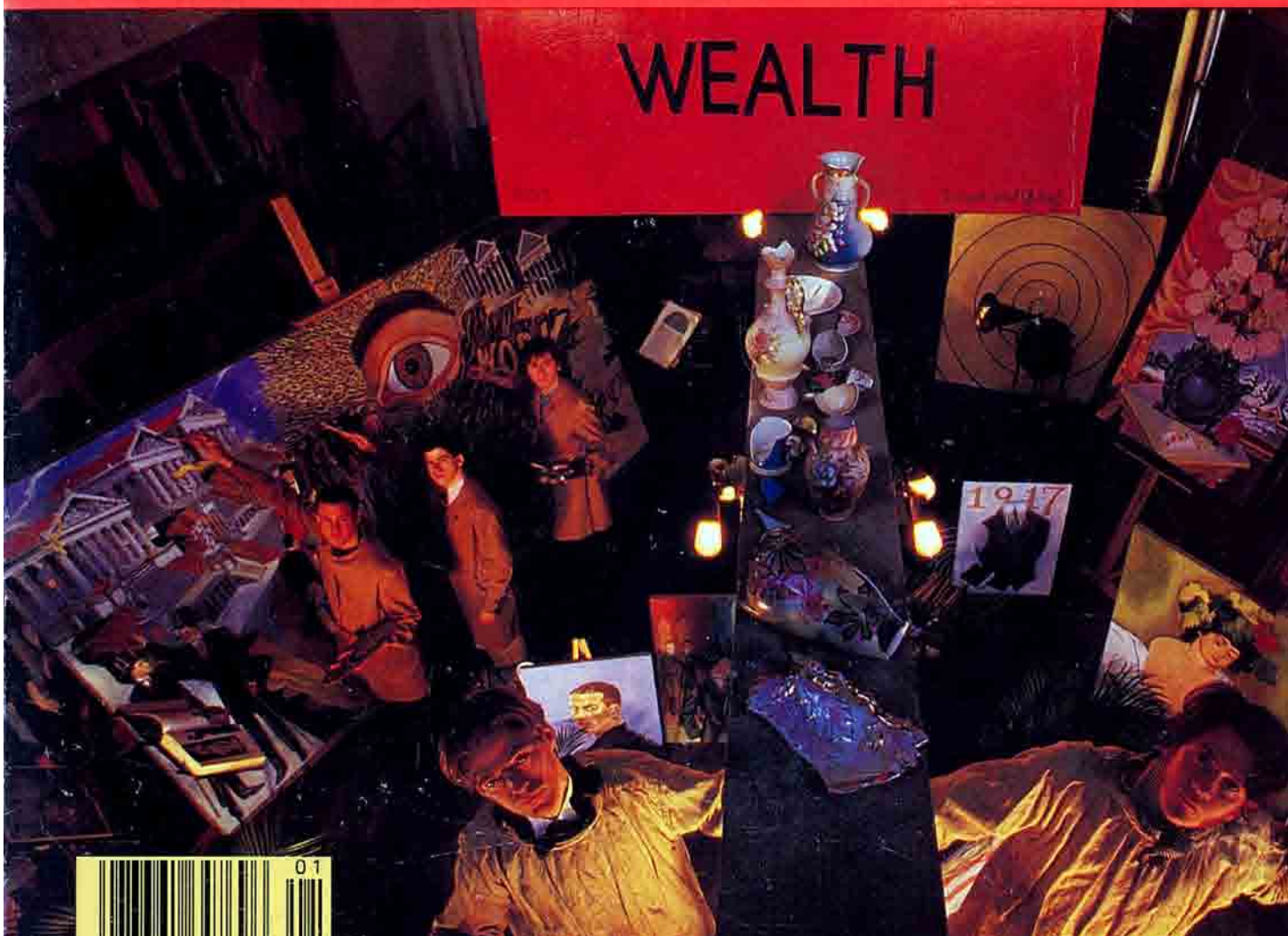
Art in Americ

January 1993

ARTISTS & ASSISTANTS

Rembrandt & His Studio: A Progress Report on the Attribution Question

And Who Makes Today's Art? An Inquiry Plus Interviews with 23 Artists



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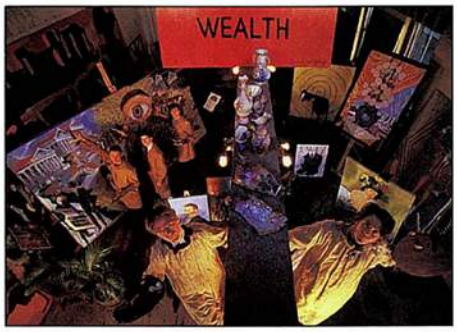

Cover: View of the studio of McDermott & McGough, New York, 1992. Photo © Josef Astor. See article on artists and assistants beginning on page 70.

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The Audit Bureau

Making Art Making Artists

In a new variant on the apprenticeship system, many artists now employ paid assistants for tasks ranging from menial labor to creative collaboration in the production of their art works. Below, comments by the author and interviews with 23 artists on the advantages and problems of this once-again popular studio relationship.

BY WADE SAUNDERS

"Who are you?" he asked, looking from one to the other. "Your assistants," they answered. . . . "What?" said K.; "are you my old assistants, whom I told to follow me and whom I am expecting?" They answered in the affirmative. "That's good," observed K. after a short pause; "I'm glad you've come."
—Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, 1926

Bob Morris is really into craft. You know he operates the forklift when the fabricator delivers his work.
—Robert Smithson, 1970

Whenever I work on modeled sculptures (not on metal ones), I have women assistants. Their voices, their gestures are, if I may plagiarize Matisse, the sources of vibrations and sensations that I wish to transmit in my art.
—Alain Kirili, 1992

A reader of art magazines might never know that artists today regularly hire assistants to help them make their work. One does not see photographs of artists and assistants working together. Pictures of Henry Moore, for example, frequently show him chopping away at large plaster sculptures. But in fact, for the last 30 years of his life, virtually all of Moore's plasters were enlarged by assistants from his palm-sized maquettes, and then shipped off to bronze foundries. Nevertheless, Moore repeatedly posed for photographers and filmmakers in attitudes that perpetuated the myth of the lonely creator.

Myths notwithstanding, in recent decades a change has occurred in the way a number of artists work. This change, though obvious from inside the art world, has been little noticed by the public. Since the late '60s artists have turned to paid assistants to help with drawings, paintings and sculptures. In the last 15 years or so working as an artist's assistant has become the employment of choice for younger artists, particularly those living in New York City, replacing such traditional secondary jobs as housepainting, light construction, art moving, framing, restaurant work, hacking, pasteup and window-display design. It used to be that writers wouldn't work as editors, painters wouldn't do commercial illustration and sculptors wouldn't work as industrial designers for fear of misspending their creative energy. Now young artists seek jobs in their

View of Henry Moore's "plastic studio" at Perry Green, built to house the construction of Reclining Figure, *1963–65. Courtesy the Henry Moore Foundation.*

Richard Serra (center) installing his **One Ton Prop (House of Cards)**, *1969, aided by Bob Fiore (back left), Philip Glass (back right) and others. Photo Peter Moore.*

own discipline, hoping to learn while they earn. They may feel that success in today's art world hinges as much on who you know as on what you do.

As an artist who once worked as an assistant and who now employs younger artists as studio assistants, I decided to write this article as a way of throwing some light on the question of who really makes the art these days. I chose to examine the relationship between artist and assistant by interviewing a broad range of artists, favoring those who either had worked as assistants themselves, or whose studio practice involves a significant use of assistants. I define assistants as people employed at least half time in an artist's studio. Artists currently working as assistants, or former assistants who have yet to show extensively were not interviewed, nor were younger artists working as artists' office managers or as independent fabricators. Artists' companions represent a sort of apprenticeship outside the scope of this article. The interviews were taped and edited, then approved by the interviewees. Allan McCollum extensively rewrote his text; Richard Artschwager insisted—in part at the urging of his chief assistant—that his interview not be published.

In an effort to get people to speak frankly, I promised they could delete things they regretted having said. Even with this assurance several painters whom I knew to have had assistants work on specific canvases declined to be interviewed, or were hopelessly guarded when they did speak. Few painters, I concluded, are willing to talk about the sometimes collaborative nature of studio practice; most prefer to suggest that they make all the decisions and do all the work. They apparently imagine that to admit otherwise is to risk diminishing their work's authenticity and, more immediately, its market value. The situation is a bit different with sculpture, since it is common knowledge that a sculptor casting bronze or working at a large scale often will have professional assistance. Drawings are supposed to be the most personal of all art works. When Robert Longo first showed his "Men in the Cities" drawings, he provoked a stir by being up-front about having paid an assistant to help do the rendering. Other artists making large-scale drawings took the hint and even

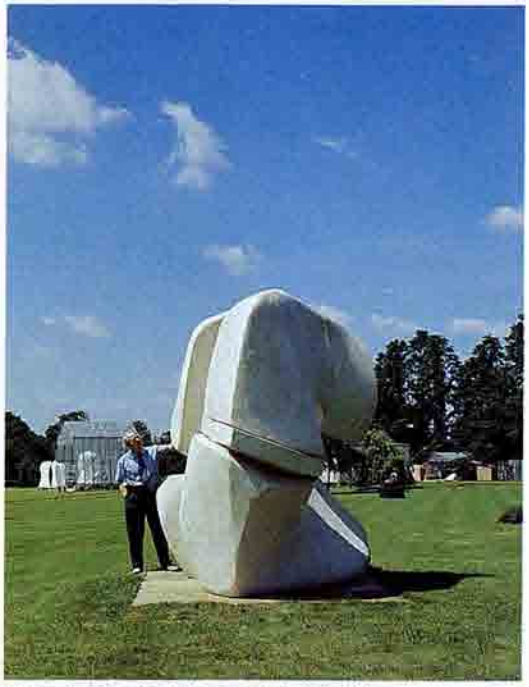
Isaac Witkin

Born 1936, Johannesburg, South Africa. Studied at St. Martins School of Art, London, 1957–60. Currently lives in Pemberton, N.J. Most recent solo exhibition at Walker Hill Art Center, Seoul, Korea, 1992. Forthcoming exhibition at Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, 1993.

Henry Moore must have had some sort of apprenticeship program in effect by the early '50s, since Tony Caro felt free to ask him for a job then. I worked for Moore for two and a half years, between 1961 and 1963. When I first started, there were four of us working full-time, and it increased to six by the time I left. It was about an hour from London, and I commuted there. Moore owned several houses around his studio which he rented at nominal cost to those assistants who wanted to reside there. No one really stayed on permanently, though perhaps it happened after I left; people would work for two, three, five years at the most. There may have been over 100 assistants in total who passed through the studio in Moore's lifetime. There weren't any women when I was there, and I don't think he hired any women previous to that time.

I was paid a mere pittance at the time, not enough to live on. Moore was not a big payer in those days. Just after I left, a group of assistants marched up to him in protest and demanded more pay, since they just couldn't get by. I don't remember the outcome; he may have given them a slight raise. He didn't believe in paying high wages to assistants because it was a privilege to work for him and he was a bit tight with money.

Moore worked in a small studio in the back



Henry Moore standing next to **Locking Piece**, *1963–64, bronze. Courtesy the Henry Moore Foundation.*

***"Moore didn't make an issue of his use of assistants; instead, he projected the layman's ideal of the heroic, lone sculptor."*—Isaac Witkin**

of the complex in which we were working. It was probably about 15 feet square, low-ceilinged, very intimate; he used to sit in a wicker chair, listening to the radio, with a small turning stand so he could rotate what he was working on. He would produce his little maquettes there, then put the completed studies—some no more than 2 or 3 inches tall—on various shelves. He usually had a particular assistant in mind to carry out a particular enlargement; he would call you in, point to a certain shelf and ask which maquette you wanted to enlarge.

Sometimes we would go up directly to full scale; other times we would do an intermediary-scale version. He asked me to make one piece that derived from some animal-spine bones that locked together, in around a 3-foot scale. The sculpture was greatly admired by Gordon Bunshaft, who commissioned Moore to enlarge it to around 14 feet. The decision to go to a larger scale usually rested on whether someone liked the piece enough to commission it bigger. I don't think he would have made the pieces that large on a speculative basis.

Like Rodin, Moore was a great believer in the hand and in handcrafting. Even in a period when he was really under pressure to produce, he never allowed himself to be contaminated by a kind of assembly-line industrialism. My clearest memory of the place was that the only mechanized piece of equipment he had was an electric drill. He wouldn't allow anything on the premises that looked like a body-grinder or a welder. We would do things in a very labor-intensive way. I carried out about five sculptures: the locking piece at the two scales, the arch that is at the Museum of Modern Art, and a three-part reclining figure that is at the Hirshhorn. An Australian sculptor named Ron Robinson Young-Swann and I worked for about a year on the 25-foot piece of sculpture for Lincoln Center. When it was finished it was like a mountain of plaster, and we looked at what we had made it with—a plastic bowl, a couple of cheese graters and a trowel—and then looked at each other and burst out laughing. The only thing that Moore allowed on the premises was lifting equipment; he would hire a crane every time we had to move something, but it was painful for him to see this thing rolling into the driveway. He left all the casting and carving to the industry; he didn't want to have evidence of that in his environment.

Moore would spend a lot of time with the work on weekends, when the assistants had left. He would make assessments and know exactly what directions to give you when you got back. Or sometimes he would take a piece outside, rotate it, look at it from 200 yards. He would go over it with a fine-tooth comb, and you would make notations about moving this or that element, and that would be enough for you to carry the work to the next phase. I remember I was working on the arch piece for the Modern; I thought I was doing a pretty good job. Moore gave me a sculpture lesson then and there. When he started getting into the analysis of what his form intentions were it was an amazing revelation. I realized how little I knew about organic volume. One also learned from the other assistants, who had already had this kind of exposure to his criticism. After that experience, I understood what he was about, and he never had to critique me again. In fact he just looked at the work and said "fine" and never touched it. There were several pieces which he didn't even lay a mark on because he trusted my understanding of his intentions. He told me he liked certain independent decisions I had made regarding texture and the like.

We didn't get any public credit. Moore didn't want to make an issue of the fact that his work was done by a group effort, but instead wanted to project the layman's ideal of the lone heroic sculptor struggling with the material. A lot of artists are like that; they are afraid to admit the kind of collective energy going into the work, afraid of people's prejudices. In the trade everyone knew how Henry worked, and he knew that everyone knew. But public perception is very different. People think that the business of making art is the sweating of the brushstroke or the chisel mark; they don't understand that the hard part is the conceptual part, when you have to keep making decisions moment to moment.

Moore had a benign interest in those of us who were serious; you knew he was aware of what you were doing on your own and that he would visit your shows. But he was reserved, he wanted to retain some of his privacy, especially since the activities were carried on in his own home.

When I started teaching at Bennington College in the mid-'60s, a fellow working in the drama department started to help me on a part-time basis, and I taught him about sculpture. But when Ken Noland, Jules Olitski and Tony Caro came on the scene up there, my assistant left me for the higher pay and greater glamour the others offered. That is one of the risks you run with assistants: you train people and they stay with you for as long as it takes them to get a certain kind of personal confidence and basic skill level, then they're off, either on their own or to higher places. I felt I had had enough of that and decided to get someone to help me who didn't come out of an art background.

Recently I've tended to hire people full-time for a fixed period—usually a year—and that has worked well. But with the IRS enforcing stricter and stricter guidelines as to what constitutes an independent contractor, as opposed to an employee, I've become uncertain. I never know how long I can maintain someone, or whether it will work out. There is nothing in the law that provides for those sorts of contingencies.

I do whatever the assistants do; I never delegate any work that I wouldn't do myself. Sometimes roles reverse, and I'm under the direction of an assistant who may know more technically than I do. I like to keep my hand in the work all the way through. It would probably help me if I could develop a greater sense of remove, but, you know, I've always been a worker, and it's hard to change habits.

Robert Morris

Born 1931, Kansas City, Mo. Studied at Kansas City Art Institute, 1948-50; Reed College, Oregon, 1953-55; Hunter College, New York, MA 1966. Currently lives in Gardiner, N.Y. Most recent solo exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1992. Public installation at Kansas City Stockyards, 1992.

I don't know anyone in my generation who worked for another artist; it wasn't something that people did.

I was always interested in technical processes, saw them as part of the work, and so I made most things myself. I began using fabricators in the mid-'60s when Lippincott opened. They invited me to come up and make a piece on speculation. I worked with them on the large metal pieces for a number of years. I laid up the fiberglass pieces myself, though I had someone help me build the molds. After a while a guy opened a shop on Staten Island and started making those pieces.

In the early '70s a student of mine worked for me for a while. I probably didn't get a full-time assistant until I built a big studio up in the country in 1975. One of the men who had worked on the house and was a good craftsman started working for me in the studio. He has continued for 16 years. He is not an artist. I remember when I needed something welded, I went and learned how to weld and then taught him. Within a week he could do it much better than I; there was no longer a point in my welding. I'll occasionally pick up local people if I've got a big project. For the "Firestorm" series I worked the clay, and my assistant and some others took the molds and laid up the fiberglass.

I am involved in various large outdoor works where I'm more like an architect. In that context I'll hire engineers or fabricators or foundries as I need them. But I don't have any need for a group of people in my studio. More assistants wouldn't make the work go any faster.

Gary Stephan

Born 1942, Brooklyn. Studied at Parsons School of Design, New York, 1960-61; Art Students League, New York, 1961; Pratt Institute, New York, 1960-61; San Francisco Art Institute, MFA 1967. Currently lives in

Some Renaissance artists ran enormous studios with numerous assistants. In the 20th century, Gonzalez worked for Picasso, Lachaise for Manship, Noguchi for Brancusi, Pollock for Benton.

now remain discreet about their working methods.

I worked full-time as a sculptor's assistant for 18 months in 1971 and '72; I was paid $75 a week before withholding and received a $25 raise after six months. My employer never acknowledged the fact that 90 percent of the labor on his sculptures was done by two co-workers and me. So, when I started using assistants in 1977, I determined to give them credit in my exhibitions. For a 1982 show I had in New York, one person was identified as having done the wax work, one the bronze chasing, one the patination and one the painting. My dealer complained that collectors would wonder what I had done, and asked that the sign be removed or reduced to a list of names. With reluctance I agreed to a simplified list. I've since had the same experience with other dealers.

Even when a dealer consents to an artist's prominently thanking assistants —as opposed to putting a note on the first page of the guest book, where it is little noticed—assistants are likely to discover themselves shunted aside at any gallery party. Artists find it easier to acknowledge assistants during museum shows, since the institution is not in the role of a sales agent. Several of the artists most forthcoming in these interviews remain otherwise unwilling to credit their assistants publicly. It is also true that certain assistants who have their own careers don't want to be named as assistants, and that, for artists who employ a large number of people, a list may appear self-aggrandizing.

Artists have used assistants for centuries. Some Renaissance artists ran enormous studios with numerous assistants. Students in 19th-century ateliers learned, in part, by assisting; Rodin spent several years in Carrier Belleuse's studio. As Rodin's own career progressed he came to have numerous people in his employ (among them Antoine Bourdelle, Camille Claudel, Jules Desbois, Charles Despiau and Pompon). Julio Gonzalez worked for Pablo Picasso, Gaston Lachaise for Paul Manship, Isamu Noguchi briefly for Constantin Brancusi and Jackson Pollock for Thomas Hart Benton. Henry Moore started hiring assistants after World War II; Bernard Meadows, Anthony Caro, Philip King, Isaac Witkin and Richard Wentworth all passed through his workshop. Among photographers, Imogen Cunningham was Edward S. Curtis's assistant, Berenice Abbott, Bill Brandt and Lee Miller worked for Man Ray, and Diane Arbus worked for and with Lisette Model.

In America, assistants virtually vanished from studios for 30 years following the onset of the Great Depression. Those artists lucky enough to support themselves seldom had money left over for studio help. Abstract-Expressionist painters worked in a way that had everything to do with the authenticity of the physical gesture of the maker of the work, so assistants would have been inappropriate even when affordable. A few sculptors in the '50s did bring people into their studios to help with labor-intensive processes: Leon Kroll welded for David Smith for years, and Reuben Nakian depended on Larry McCabe to make his large steel pieces in the late '50s.

As more money began to flow in the '60s, artists started hiring assistants. Johns and Rauschenberg were among the first to do so; the scale of some of Rauschenberg's works made assistants a necessity. Warhol called his studio, heavily populated by assistants and groupies, the Factory. When I asked Joel Fisher about the late '60s, he emphasized that the art world was less hierarchical then and that artists who were making money sometimes helped out their friends by hiring them as short-term assistants, so that what little money there was might go a bit further. In this period sculptors were more likely to work with fabricators than to hire studio assistants.

The galleries that started opening in SoHo in 1971 were significantly larger than those uptown and, in a sense, forced artists to work more rapidly or at a larger scale, which often made assistants a virtual necessity. By the mid-'70s many artists started having several solo shows a year; working alone, they

New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Baumgartner Galleries, Washington, D.C., October 1992. Forthcoming installation at Mary Boone Gallery, New York, spring 1993.

Working for someone very good scared the shit out of me. I was afraid I could fall under their spell, and my own work would never recover. I had seen it happen.

Jasper Johns met John Duff at a party and they got to talking. Jasper needed an assistant; John said he didn't need a job but he knew someone who did. So the next day I went over, and Jasper asked me what hours I wanted to work and what money I wanted to earn. Ten A.M. to 3 P.M. seemed good to me, and I quoted the money from the last job I had had. He said, "Fine, I'll see you tomorrow." There was no comment. It was very much the character of the relationship all along that he wouldn't commit himself to telling me how I was doing, whether he thought something was too much or too little. He let people live their lives. He must have given me a set of keys that day, because it seems to me that the next morning I let myself in and found the mail on the floor. I picked it up and sorted it commercial/personal and put it on the table. I saw a coffee pot so I made coffee; I emptied the ashtrays. He came downstairs, sat right down, reached for the two piles of mail and went through them, drank the coffee, got up and went to work as though we had always done it this way. He didn't comment on liking or disliking having the mail sorted, didn't comment on the coffee, just took it and went about his business. That was the way most of my job was structured.

I worked for him for about a year and a half. Things would just happen: the phone would ring, and I would answer it. I began to take messages. Someone would come over, they would sit around talking, then Jasper would say, "I think we should go to lunch." So I'd ask them where, I'd make a reservation, I'd run outside and get a cab, and then I'd say to them, "I have a cab for you," and they would come out, and we would all go to lunch. One of the nicest things was that when lunch wasn't taken out Jasper would prepare lunch for whoever was coming. I got a crash course in the best and brightest in the art world—John Cage was at lunch, Cy Twombly was at lunch, Leo Castelli was at lunch. I got to be the fly on the wall. In some ways I was invisible, and in other ways I was given extraordinary access. One of my few regrets is that I didn't realize at the time—having no basis for comparison—that I wouldn't always have the opportunity to have Jasper visit my studio or sit around drinking wine for an hour getting his point of view on things. I thought this was what life was going to be like; only in retrospect did I realize how incredibly lucky and special this moment was.

Very little in the way of stretching or prepping canvases needed to be done because Jasper was in the process of repainting the *Dymaxion Map of the World* that he had shown at the New York World's Fair. It was going to be shown in this enormous upstairs conference room at the Modern, whence it

went to the Ludwig Collection. It was broken down into triangles, and once Jasper had me take the canvas off one of the triangles, restretch it, then project that section of the map of the world and draw it in charcoal. That is the only time I actually touched the work. That project took around a year to complete.

Jasper had it in his mind that he wanted to work on some sort of paper that would resist ink and let it pool and dry up without it ever affecting the paper. I was sent out to research this and came up with a kind of textured mylar made for drafting, which is what he used for a number of drawings when he wasn't working on the map. Every day the man did the work. There was never a time that he wasn't putting the brush to the surface. The only time he took off was for the lunches.

Jasper was a painter in his studio, with, in a manner of speaking, his earlier pictures functioning as the subject matter for the next iteration. One saw how extraordinarily deliberate and meditative each one of the marks was. I'd never imagined such a level of attention and concentration was possible until I saw him work that way. He would put a drip of wax on the big map, stand there and watch it move down the canvas. When it got to a certain point he would go over and blow on it. I understand it better now, but at the time it was amazing to me. The disturbed relationship between subject matter and meaning is a fundamental question of 20th-century art. Working for Jasper, I learned that his was one of the most credible ways of attacking that problem; he had enormous integrity. At lunch I would always push him to give a kind of didactic meaning to the pictures, never appreciating that it was the very inability to offer such meaning that gave the work its humanity. So literally for a year of lunches I wasted my time trying to get this guy to answer the wrong question. He was incredibly tolerant. I would certainly have fired me after six months.

The only thing I found hard was when John Duff, Bob Lobe and Neil Jenney would come over and play Ping-Pong, and I would have to serve everybody coffee and soda and beer. They just took it for granted; everybody acted like this was a perfectly normal relationship. These were guys who, within another hour or so, I was going to see as peers: we all lived in the same building.

Eventually David Whitney, who had worked for Jasper earlier, decided that he was going to have a gallery. He took some of his advice from Jasper, and Jasper had seen my work and Neil's and John's, and he recommended the three of us, and David took us all on, in some measure taking Jasper's counsel. When I had my show, David was able to sell all of the work. I stopped working for Jasper. I think Lois Lane replaced me when I left.

I don't know when I got my first assistant, but it must have been at least 15 years ago. I've always had only one assistant at a time, unless I had interns or took on someone special to help with the sculpture. My first studio assistant happened to be a Scottish count-

couldn't keep up with the demand, especially if they had to travel, often abroad, to install exhibitions. As the art world kept expanding throughout the '80s, so did the number of assistants, with almost all successful artists employing one or more by the end of the decade.

The process of working changes when an assistant comes into an artist's studio. Giving up one's solitude can take some getting used to. The assistant may validate the work in subtle ways, lending the artist confidence and helping with decisions; the assistant's advice is often solicited, though it is not always followed. An assistant toiling steadily on days when nothing else seems to go right provides a kind of reassurance. At times the artist will conceive pieces only because the skills possessed by a particular assistant make them possible; alternately, when a skilled assistant quits, the art may have to change.

The work moves faster when an assistant is involved. Change is often easier, because you will more readily destroy something the assistant has done than something you have made. An artist/assistant relationship which goes well helps both to see their own art more clearly. Assistants may become collaborators and friends, and so it can be difficult when they move on—whether for the sake of change, to switch to a "hotter" artist, or just to get back to their own studio full-time. The loss of the rapport that has developed is more painful than the loss of the helping hands. Many older artists prefer hiring long-term employees with specific skills rather than assistants who are themselves artists. They run their studios as little factories, sometimes employing five or more people. They want a stable work force, and young artists inevitably go their own ways.

There are rewards for a young artist who works as an assistant. Among the first things an assistant understands is that being an artist is a prosaic full-time job. You don't learn that in school. While students or young artists usually try to do things as quickly as possible, assistants may have time to acquire or refine a variety of technical skills, since they are being paid to do things well. Assistants typically will work for several artists over time and will often come to appreciate the thoroughness of their employers' decision-making processes and raise their expectations regarding their own practice accordingly.

An assistant sees that art-making is a business with inventory, receivables, discounts, profits and losses. The business depends on the art, but also on its marketing, which can consume large chunks of working time. Some artists use assistants as buffers between themselves and the world; the artist is freed to work, and the assistant gets to meet a lot of people. An assistant learns how fluid art-world roles can be: critics sometimes collect; collectors may function as dealers; dealers occasionally tell their artists what to do. Frequently assistants are involved in installing exhibitions—important experience which is otherwise difficult to come by.

Artists depend on their assistants. They well know the drudgery that the assistants' labor spares them. With the help of assistants, artists can double or triple their production, finishing work faster and probably better. They can exhibit in more places more often, increasing their visibility. As long as pieces are selling, assistants more than pay for themselves. Since the assistant's work is often repetitive, she or he may become more skilled or exacting than the artist as regards certain studio tasks. Both the artist and the assistant may wonder, usually in secret, who is assisting whom. As time pressure mounts, roles may reverse and the artist will do the errands, make the coffee or handle telephone calls so the assistant can work most efficiently. Since assistants are indispensable around deadlines, artists try to support them in slack times. An artist who doesn't have enough work to keep a good assistant busy may ask friends to provide temporary employment for that individual.

Some artists help their assistants get shows; they share connections and offer emotional support; they look out for their assistants when on grant panels. Other artists have no interest whatsoever in the assistant's work or life. When artists who themselves have worked as assistants start hiring associates of their own, they often replicate the studio relationship they first experienced. The number of women working as assistants seems to have increased in step

View of assistants installing

ess. She stretched and prepped canvases, cleaned brushes, wrote letters, and answered the phone with an accent to die for. I took a lot of my style as to what to do with studio assistants from Jasper in that I tended to not give them things to do and hope that they would sort of fill in the blanks in an interesting way. Most people if you leave them alone get very nervous, and they think of things, look around and see what has to be done.

Will Mentor came up to me and said, "I am going to be the most expensive and the best studio assistant you've ever had. If you hire me you'll have more things done more quickly than you've had done before. Just let me take care of everything." I said, "Okay, take care of everything." It was exactly the right thing to say to me. I've always tried to have my assistants overlap one another so they can pass on the information about where everything is in the studio, since to this day I don't know where things are kept.

As much as possible I try to have the assistant be a screen between me and the city, so that the only thing I am doing is standing in front of this painting, and everything else is their domain: the photographs, the books, the phone, the prep work, the cleaning. The purpose of a studio assistant is to make that clear space at the center of the practice so that you can just get the work done. Having more assistants wouldn't allow me to do more paintings. I've always hoped that my assistants would feel free to talk about their work or mine. I don't always know what's going on here; if they've got some ideas about what this thing is, I'm thrilled to listen.

Now I feel closer to the way Jasper goes about his business than to anyone else's way I can think of. In some way the original fear—if you work for a strong artist it will rub off on you—has come true.

Ann Hamilton

Born 1956, Lima, Ohio. Studied at University of Kansas, BFA 1979; Yale School of Art, MFA 1985. Currently lives in Columbus, Ohio. Most recent solo exhibition at List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, October 1992.

In graduate school I started doing installations involving accumulations or accretions of materials. At first I tried to do everything myself. Unconsciously perhaps, I set up these increasingly Sisyphean tasks, and my friends would then pitch in to get me out of a jam. They would joke that if they wanted to see me they would have to come help me. In time, my working process became ever more social. We choose to work in a particular way because we need certain contacts in our lives; then we keep working that way.

My thinking process has always been very conversational. My friends or helpers become sounding boards. My work takes a lot of research, and that involves conversations of different sorts. I have never just gone into a studio every day and worked by myself. For a 1988 show at MOCA in L.A., I needed to

As the art world kept expanding through the 1980s, so did the number of assistants, with almost all successful artists employing one or more by the end of the decade.

with the visibility and financial success of women artists, though women often hire men, and vice versa.

Eventually, usually after working between one and four years, most assistants realize that they've learned as much as they are going to learn and resolve to get on with their own art full-time, a choice which the artist may encourage. Or they may seek employment less compromising to their creative thinking and energy, since working as an assistant can leave one perpetually feeling sucked dry. The extreme example of this might be Diego Giacometti, whose career only took off after Alberto's death. Some assistants choose to leave the field entirely, having seen firsthand what being an artist involves.

Assisting functions differently in New York than it does in any other major art-producing city. Outside New York far fewer artists have the money to hire assistants, so younger artists seek employment outside the art world. In some places the practice is rare enough that its participants seem reluctant to speak about it directly.

In New York, which has no first-rate graduate programs in studio art except the one run by the Whitney Museum, assisting fills an educational void. In Los Angeles and London, by contrast, several schools have exceptional studio programs, where young artists are trained and where they acquire a sense of community. In going through school students learn how to find studios, materials, jobs.

Although some artists treat their assistants as salaried employees, or have their gallery do so as part of their stipend, most artists find it much easier, and around 25 percent cheaper, to pay their assistants as though they were independent contractors. This way the artist only writes checks for the actual hours worked and needn't bother with withholding, social-security contributions or unemployment-insurance premiums. Assistants typically earn between $8 and $20 per hour in New York. The artist may or may not carry Workers' Compensation or Disability Insurance, and only in rare cases does the assistant receive health insurance.

As independent contractors, assistants can more readily deduct their own studio expenses on their tax returns and may manage to avoid paying social-security tax. But in the eyes of the Internal Revenue Service most assistants, even those working part-time, are legally employees—they have assigned hours and tasks, report to a supervisor and work in the artist's place of business—and should therefore be subject to withholding and be eligible for unemployment benefits. A couple of artists are presently losing in court to the IRS over this issue. If an accident occurs, one of the first things an insurance company may request is employment records to see how the assistant was being paid. Some assistants have sued their employers for failing to properly withhold taxes, in which case the employer becomes liable for unpaid taxes, social-security contributions, penalties and interest.

With the relative collapse of the art market over the last two years, a number of artists have had to cut back on expenses, including assistants' wages. But when the market picks up again, so, doubtless, will the hiring of assistants. While some artists will never want assistants, many artists will work with them if they possibly can, since assistants free up their time and allow them to produce significantly more work. Young artists know that working as an assistant will pay their rent; the job may also help them develop their own work and give them the connections to get it shown. A great deal of what is exhibited would not exist without the labor of assistants. They play an essential part in the creation of contemporary art, even though artists may deny or downplay their role. □

Author: *Wade Saunders is an artist and critic who divides his time between Paris and New York.*

locate printers who would lend me 10 tons of linotype, so I was on the phone every day for a good part of a month. I had to find people willing to take a break from their day and consider this thing that was out of the realm of what they usually do. I love those conversations.

Sometimes others help me with the research and gathering. For a 1990 project at the La Jolla Museum that involved an accumulation of teeth, I entrusted two people with collecting the teeth. They did a lot of calling of oral surgeons and taxidermists to find out where we could get teeth or carcasses to pull teeth out of. Through the museum I got hooked up with the man who does the autopsies of all the road kills in the area, and he helped me. That stuff takes you out in the world. Every project needs different kinds of information.

At MOCA I got into a predicament; the installation I had proposed wasn't going to get done unless a lot of people volunteered their time. Then I realized that in fact I had designed the work to reach that predicament, even though a paid assistant and I had prepared about a third of the work in advance. The installation finally involved an enormous number of people, many of them my students, but others who just happened to be around the museum. Friends, some of whom weren't involved in art, came down and took on the responsibility for particular sections of the project, so it became partially theirs. My mother came out to L.A. for over two weeks and worked around the clock; she was the tender, going shopping for groceries to feed us all.

With that piece I saw how involved I'd become with the ethic of social interaction, interaction that is conceptually tied in to what the art is about. It is not just a logistical issue. When you work intensely next to someone for long hours, especially if you are not doing it for money, a bond occurs. We all have longings to be alone but also simultaneously part of a community. Yet in a sense the community that develops around these projects is a false one, since you often don't see many of the people again.

It was after the MOCA experience that I started to consider the social process as part of the pieces. Making the work is about caring and participating in a relationship rather than being distanced and outside it. Still, there is the constant question of not wanting to take peoples' participation for granted, not wanting to use people, not wanting each and every project to require a manic collective effort.

In my installation for the Capp Street Project, I set up a process for arranging 750,000 pennies on the floor. I was aware from the beginning that this was a piece requiring an enormous amount of labor. Around two dozen people were laying pennies on the floor, and each person had a different rhythm to their movements, a different feel for pattern. The piece evidenced the accumulation of that process. If I had done it alone, the piece would not have had the same kind of life to it.

I often face the dilemma of how to acknowledge the real contribution of all those who help me. Sometimes I have put up lists of the people who worked on the project and other times I haven't; it is mostly a function of whether there is any time left. I try to include acknowledgements in the catalogues. I think the fact that I have been able to work on the scale I have is an important model for women.

In some of the big projects, I can't always be on the floor all day, although that is where I want to be. I have to step back and get the supplies, keep things organized and plan the next pieces. Yet my own direct participation, which may not be organizationally effective, is emotionally important to me. Jim Ritteman acted as the project director in Brazil and later in Seattle, so that I was able to work with everybody. He taught me a better way of managing large-scale projects; over 45 people helped in Seattle, and the total number of hours involved was pretty mind-boggling.

Peter Halley

Born 1953, New York. Studied at Yale University, BA 1975; University of New Orleans, 1978. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Michael Kohn Gallery, Santa Monica, October 1992.

It never occurred to me to work for another artist; it would have been too hard for me to do things according to an objective template that someone gave me. Up until I was 30, I considered painting a solitary activity; I even made my own stretchers. I first took an assistant around 1984; I had someone come in and help me stretch canvases and go to the art-supply store. As I became more confident about what I was doing, it became easier to go to other people for their help. I got someone extraordinarily talented to make my stretchers, and then someone else to pack, move and install my paintings. This advanced further when I began doing a little printmaking and went into a workshop and saw what fantastic things people could do, many of which were beyond my technical capabilities. It's been liberating to realize that there are people you can work with who can do things a lot better than you can. The ability to depend on people to do things expertly has helped my work.

One of my policies is that none of my five assistants works anywhere close to full time; the most is three-and-a-half days a week. It is a very important point for me: I feel a commitment to help the people who work with me survive life in New York and be able to pursue their work as artists. Some artists have full-time assistants and seem to come to dominate the psychological lives of their assistants. I've always been wary of that. The work here is hard work and doesn't directly advance the art of the people who work for me. But I try to create schedules for them so that they can pursue their own work as comfortably as possible; I try to pay them as well as I can and try not to dominate the situation psychologically. I wouldn't want someone working for me who was depressed and feeling like they couldn't do their own work, as sometimes happens to young people in New York.

The main thing around the studio is to keep everything organized. The assistants do mechanical and logistical things; I try to maximize the efficiency of my own studio time. In terms of the painting, the biggest headache is taping. In a way it is a little bit like the old days with hard-edge painting. And my taping has become particularly burdensome since 1989, when I started building up the thickness of the bands of the "conduits" going into the "cells," as I call them. These bands may get 40 or 50 coats of paint and have to be retaped each four or five coats.

I develop the colors for the paintings with small paint studies. I'll sit on the floor and mix paint out of squeeze bottles, working very spontaneously and not making notes as I go along. My assistants then match the colors and I just check them. Matching a color can really create a sort of existential angst as you add stuff drop by drop. My assistants free me of that. Sometimes I think of the analogy of a surgeon and a surgery; if I have to meet with people, my assistants might be preparing the canvas, so that when I'm through I can go in and paint it. I try to protect the actual act of painting because I really do like it.

I pay my assistants as independent contractors. I feel really strongly about this. Conceptually I don't want the people who work for me to be employees, because it is a collegial relationship. On the IRS's 20 criteria to determine whether someone is an independent contractor or an employee, I have about ten criteria in my favor. And usually the industry practice is grandfathered; for instance, coal miners are independent contractors. The art world is a subculture that to some extent works best if left alone. An employee is someone who is supervised, and I don't supervise my assistants—more like the reverse. The other reason I don't want the people in the studio to be employees is that I don't want to take their own professional status away from them in their dealings with the IRS. If they were employees they would have more difficulty deducting studio rent and materials from their taxes. If they are independent contractors, then their work here is seen as a contiguous professional activity with their own work.

My assistants have almost all been really

***"The museum put my assistants in touch with the man who does autopsies on road kills. My projects take you out into the world."*—Ann Hamilton**

***"As Jasper's assistant, I got a crash course in the best and the brightest in the art world. I got to be the fly on the wall."*—Gary Stephan**

intelligent, talented and committed people, whose own work I respect. I've had a lot of writers work for me because of my dual identity as an artist and a critic. I expect all of them to become successful in the arts. But one thing I'm really glad about is that it hasn't been a kind of fast-track career thing for them. The School of Visual of Arts, where I teach part time, increasingly has become a conduit for people to work for me. The contact with people who are a generation younger—both in the studio and in the teaching—has been very helpful to me. While I support the work of my assistants, I try to do so in a low-key way and not project anyone into the world as a product of my studio.

Marilyn Minter

Born 1948, Shreveport, La. Studied at University of Florida, Gainesville, BFA 1970; Syracuse University, MFA 1972. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Max Protetch Gallery, New York, 1992.

I worked for Kenneth Snelson from 1978 to 1980. I found the job because I was working as a plumber's assistant running and sweating copper pipe, and happened to install a sink for a friend of his. Snelson hired me because I could solder and he was using a related process in his sculpture. And I suspect he wanted an artist he could feel comfortable with. I was his first assistant. I started at around $5 per hour. I was painting nights and weekends, so I didn't think it was a good idea to paint during the day for someone else.

Kenneth was a really nice man; I wanted to do things for him. I saw that if you treated people well they would work well. He introduced me to people when they walked into the house, told people I was a painter. With other artists I've worked for, I've had them literally step over me when bringing clients in to look at their work, step over me as if I didn't exist. I didn't learn anything technical from Kenneth that I could use in my own work, but it was a good job and I was really happy to have it.

My first assistant was an intern and so didn't get paid. Like with drugs the first taste is free and I got hooked real fast. I thought, if art is about ideas then I'm freed up. I can sit here talking to you, and a painting is being made right now. Another beauty of having an assistant is that I can destroy a painting. It is not all my labor in there. I chemically strip off parts all the time. I doubt if I could do it as easily if it was my labor, because it is such labor-intensive painting. Everyone thinks the paintings are silk-screened, but in fact they are hand-painted. It is just not always my hand. I paint the underpainting.

In my work I usually have to figure it out and then teach the assistants how to do it. The assistants go on until I stop them; I'm the one who has to make sure that the piece doesn't get overworked. I used to pride myself on working faster than anybody else in the studio, but I can't say that anymore; sometimes I can't even remember whether I painted certain parts or not. Assistants help me keep the skill issues out of the work: I don't feel compelled to go and make every-

Assistants Wayne Gonzales (front) and James Bell (rear) working in Peter Halley's studio, 1992. Photo © L. Ruyter.

***"My first assistant was an intern and so didn't get paid. Like with drugs the first taste is free and I got hooked real fast."*—Marilyn Minter**

thing that they've done perfect. Now I can let what's going to happen happen.

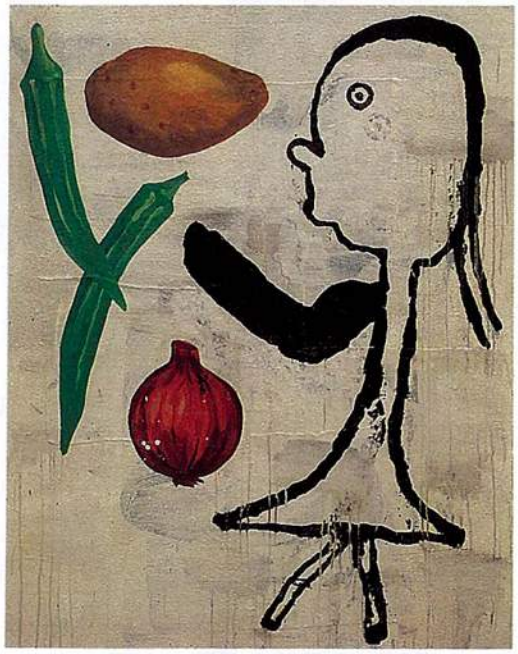
I have to hire people who have a certain skill level but who can daydream, because doing the work can be so boring. It's like knitting, where you space out to keep working. Although they are following a projector, they have to be able to draw. And I hire people because of our personal interaction. There are people more skilled than those who've worked for me, but I know we wouldn't get along. The studio is not a business, it has to be a harmonious place. I ask my assistants' opinions all the time, and they help me make decisions.

I used to hire almost all women, but I'd always have one guy in there. I want to overcompensate and hire women, but then I don't want to discriminate. I've gotten most of my workers from the School of Visual Arts, where I teach, so I know who I'm hiring. I get a call every couple of months from people wanting to work here, some for free. But I don't want to go back to having a lot of assistants as I did last year when I was trying to finish 100 paintings in nine months. There was too much waste: I had to erase a lot of paintings.

I hire people who have a lot of character, then I try to give them space, since I know what it is like to work for somebody else. My current main assistant has worked for me for four years; she works 30 hours a week, and is worth more than I can afford to pay her right now. She can take time off to go talk to her dealer if she is in some group show, or go look at some art if she wants to take a break. You really have to be in the mood to do these benday dots I use.

There is a part of me, when I get a really good assistant, that wants to keep them shut up in a box. I fight the impulse and try to do the opposite: if I hear of a show where I think she would belong I encourage her to walk over and introduce herself. I get everybody in my gallery to go see her first show; I tell everyone how good she is. She's showing, and it's time for her not to work here anymore. We'll try to have a healthy split. The way I was treated as an assistant absolutely affects the way I treat my assistants.

There are prejudices in the art world against certain kinds of practices, prejudices I don't share. When I did the television commercial for my show at Simon Watson, I thought it important to show the assistants painting on the metal structures. I'm an image-maker, and, as long as the image gets done right, it doesn't matter how it got there. There is a certain skill-level involved, but the skill is replaceable. Art is about ideas. I am a painter, and the hand is important. But it doesn't have to be my hand. I can hire a lot of people who can make that little mark.



Donald Baechler*: Study for Bauer Gruenwald, *1989, acrylic, oil and collage on linen, 50 by 40 inches.

Donald Baechler

Born 1952, Hartford, Conn. Studied at Maryland Institute, Baltimore, 1974-77; Cooper Union, New York, 1977-78; Staatliche Hochschule für bildende Künste, Frankfurt, 1978-79. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition Sperone Gallery, Rome, November 1992.

When I worked for the Dia Foundation in 1980 as a guard at Walter de Maria's *Earth Room*, he used to come in once in a while to ask me to clean bird shit off the windows, or point out some weeds I hadn't noticed or a light bulb that was burned out or say that part of the dirt looked too dry. But those were really maintenance issues, like telling the janitor to mop up the floor. I enjoyed the job enormously, but I never felt like I was working for Walter, but for Heiner Friedrich.

I could first afford an assistant in 1983. I had a technical question that I couldn't solve myself, and I suddenly had the money to pay someone to do it. I wanted to glue paper onto canvas, and paper shrinks incredibly. It was causing disasters right and left. Then I met a young artist who was gluing paper on canvas in his own work, so I gave him a job. He worked for several months until we solved the problem.

I have had assistants more or less continuously since then. They come and they go. You hire people either for what they can teach you or what you can teach them. My current assistant stretches canvases, prepares collage backgrounds and mixes colors. He may match colors in existing paintings, or I'll tell him I want a range of four different greens. He makes sure that all the paint is there when I want to start painting, that the canvases are stretched and the brushes are clean. He does the things I absolutely don't want to do.

Sometimes the same assistants have worked with me on the sculptures and the paintings, sometimes they've been different. With the sculptures, the initial job of the assistants was to build the armatures and start mocking-up the forms, which I then finished. The surface was always articulated by me. I am looking at one sculpture as we speak that three different people worked on, as well as myself.

The assistants should not expect that my studio is part of their continuing education, or necessarily expect to socialize with me and make connections through working in my studio. Artists are ambitious, and they may think this is the place to be to get ahead on the road they've set out for themselves. I'm not necessarily going to help someone to do that, because I want them gessoing or mixing paint, not glad-handing people at my front door. That hasn't been a problem recently, though it was in the past. But those people didn't last very long. If you want to help an assistant, and there is some way you can help them, then of course you do.

In 1988 I was painting vegetables, based on illustrations from a children's book that I had bought in India, and was really unhappy with the way I was painting them. I had thought about calling up a commercial sign painter and having him come in and paint on my paintings. Then I met a young artist who said he could paint vegetables. I got the idea from McDermott and McGough, who had hired people for specific painting skills: they had someone to paint dinosaur flesh and a different person to paint flowers. So I hired this artist to help me paint vegetables. I would lay out the outlines and compose the paintings and together we would fill them in. In most paintings I would do some of the cucumbers and okras, and let him do the potatoes and onions.

After a while I ran out of vegetable ideas, and there never really was anything else I needed help painting. I used to delegate a lot more responsibility to assistants. Now I do as much as possible myself. I've realized I want everything to be something I touched; everything that goes on the canvas, goes on by me.

I don't view that episode as any sort of collaboration, although some types of collaboration do interest me. In the early '80s I used to go into bars and have drunk people do drawings for me. I wanted to relearn everything from the beginning, starting with the simplest kinds of gestures, and I found that nonartists did the kind of drawing I wanted to

Faith Ringgold (right) and her mother, Madame Willi Posey, working on Echoes of Harlem *quilt, 1980.*

do. So I would have them draw for me, watch the way their hands moved and how they put lines together.

What I'm doing now is also, in many ways, a collaborative process, but not the usual sort. A small group of friends and acquaintances, who know what I'm interested in, seem always to be sending me certain kinds of illustrated books, certain kinds of bad advertising, certain kinds of children's drawings. The material just pours in; I have boxes and boxes of it. I can look at a painting in my studio and say that it is based on, copied from or inspired by this particular drawing that this particular person brought me.

Faith Ringgold

Born 1930, New York. Studied at City University, New York, BS 1955, MA 1959. Currently lives in New York. Recent traveling retrospective organized by Mills College Museum, Oakland, Calif., closed at Tacoma Museum, December 1992.

When I was painting traditionally I did like everybody else: you paint your pictures by yourself. I still paint the pictures by myself, but I don't just paint pictures, I incorporate them into tonkas which have to be sewn, or into quilts which have to be sewn and quilted. It was the use of fabric which led me to start working with an assistant in 1973. That assistant was my mother, Madame Willi Posey. She was really a collaborator, because I couldn't tell her what to do.

It was natural for us to work together on my work because I had spent years helping her with hers. She was a fashion designer, and when I was young I went shopping with her for fabrics and worked for her as a seamstress and did some handwork. We would be up all night before her shows, getting everything perfect. That's how I learned to sew. It wasn't a job in that I didn't get paid. Then when I needed her, she helped me the way I had helped her. It was great working with her because she really was an artist, though she didn't think of herself that way. She thought of herself as a busjnesswoman and of me as an artist, because I made work I couldn't sell. She never made anything she couldn't sell.

We got into wrangles all the time. My mother was perfect. She never thought she made a mistake about anything, so there was no way you were going to tell her that something she did was wrong. She had that kind of feeling about herself, and I knew that. The first thing she did for me was to make the tonkas for a series of works called "Slave Rape." They were big new paintings, and I was having a 10-year retrospective at the Voorhees Museum at Rutgers. We had shopped endlessly for these tapestry fabrics, discussing which fabrics she would use for which paintings. But we didn't discuss the design; that would have been a no-no. I assumed she would follow the pattern of the ones I previously had done myself, where the framing was symmetrical, inactive, not a work in itself. But it never occurred to her that she should follow me.

When I returned in a couple of weeks she had made the tonkas, sewn them on and even made the dust cloths that go over the paintings. But she had done it very asymmetrically and randomly. I said to myself, "She's ruined my work." But I couldn't say anything to her, because she would have told me that I didn't know what I was talking about, that I should stick to my painting because she was doing this. So I never said anything. The work went up at the show; I loved it, and it became the pattern for what I did later. If you want to collaborate with someone you really have to respect their art.

The last project we did together was in

***"I'm not interested in training someone to do something. I prefer to see what kind of skills they have that I don't have."*—Ellen Driscoll**

***"If assistants are known to be actively involved in the production of your work, it detracts from your financial success."*—Jack Goldstein**

1980. It was my first quilt, called *Echoes of Harlem*. My mother had made quilts with her grandmother, and she immediately reverted back to how her grandmother had done it, using triangles. I said I would cut the pattern. She said, "What pattern?" I said that they all had to be the same size. She said, "No they don't." For fabric in clothes she had patterns, but when it came to fabric in art she thought of no patterns. She gave me the idea of using triangles, so I did a drawing and decided that it was better to lay it out my way. So she told me, "These triangles you want, you cut them and I'll sew them for you." She could sew together anything anybody could cut. What was most wonderful about our collaboration was that she began to understand what I was doing, to sympathize with it and to like it. My mother's name appears on everything she worked on.

After my mother's death in 1981 I worked alone for several years. My first assistant was Barbara Pollack, who came to me through Claire Tankel at the Mayor's office. I had to learn how to show someone else what I wanted done, because I didn't need a collaborator, I needed an assistant. I had never shown my mother what to do: I would just tell her what I wanted, and she would find a way to do it. I started making scale drawings on graph paper and coding each fabric with the drawing. I often used my mother's ideas as the basis for designs. Since 1984 I've split each year between New York and California. I now have assistants working in each place; they keep working when I am not around, just following the drawings. They learn a lot of skills from me, learn all my processes; by the time they are finished they can do exactly what I am doing.

My assistants allow me to get so much more work done. When I first started with quilts in 1980 it took us a year to do that first one. In 1983 I did a second quilt; in 1985 I did three. In 1986, when I had assistants, I did eight, in '87 about 12. My current project is a series of 12 super-big quilts with very involved stories, which were done in under two years. My assistant Denise Mumm helped me with all aspects of the project.

I like my assistants to be able to cook, because we have to have lunch. I did my 100-pound weight-loss performance with the help of an assistant. What my assistants eat is very important, because I don't like to have certain kinds of foods around me—foods which are tempting, but which I've forbidden myself.

One very important thing my assistants help me do is edit the stories, most of which I work into my quilts. We sit down and read a story, talk about editorial issues, work to make sure the story flows and that the listener gets out of the story what I am intending. I'm getting better at it, but in the beginning I was terrible, I was so involved with the narrative. I collaborated with my assistant Lisa Yi on two stories, one of which we sold to a magazine. I've always helped my assistants as much as I could with getting their own work shown.

Jack Goldstein

Born 1945, Montreal. Studied at Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, 1970; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, 1972. Currently lives in Chicago. Most recent exhibition originated at Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, traveled to the Power Plant, Toronto, 1991-92.

I worked in Los Angeles from '71 through '78. I hired industry people—cameramen, sound men, actors and actresses—to make slick, super-16-mm films that looked like television commercials in terms of quality. That basically set up the language for how I approached the work later on in my New York studio.

My first assistants were students I hired when I was teaching at the University of Hartford in 1979. They stretched canvases, helped me find images, painted. We worked with overhead projectors. I made the decisions regarding the framing, the cropping, the esthetic; established the guidelines as to what I wanted the work to look like. The paintings were about their anonymity: the sources were factual and the painting was straight copy work, like schlock illustration. There was no personal expression. My aim was to get it across well enough so it read as an image. I had one or two assistants working, though I would have preferred more because then nobody takes full responsibility for anything that gets finished. When you get involved with the painting yourself, there is a tendency to get hung up on your own shit. You start getting good at something so you don't want to let go of it. With assistants it remains impersonal. You stay with your ideas so you can move faster.

Ashley Bickerton came into the studio in '82. I was like grad school for him. I would talk over decisions with him, how we would do this or change that, or what did he think of this image. I'd listen to his advice. I'll listen to anyone's advice that makes sense to me: we take what we can, we're all great thieves. I think he picked up on some of my esthetic, since his work is all about fabrication. I respect the fact that he chooses not to use his own best skills in his work: his painting abilities are exceptional and he could be a fabulous picture-maker. He was an ambitious artist. If you have an ambitious artist working for you it can become competitive.

You have to be very intuitive about who you hire. Although all my work is airbrushed, it didn't matter if someone coming into the studio knew how to use an airbrush. What mattered was whether they were very anal. They could learn the rest. I always had enough to keep me busy with looking for the images or working on my critical writing. When Ashley was working, paintings never took more than a week to do. The geometric work, which I started doing in 1986, took longer, but since I had more people working, the paintings could move out faster. I was only organized in terms of the work. I made sure that the assistants were a smoothly running machine. The other stuff—paper work, and so on—remained as haphazard as my personal life.

Without question, if assistants are known to be actively involved in the production of your work, it detracts from your financial success, especially if you are a painter. Painting is like the infantry in the army. The infantry comes in and does the same basic things that they've been doing for 200 years. You are not supposed to screw with painting, because of its traditions and history. There remains a painterly look, a touch, a feel in the work of Johns, of Rauschenberg, even of Warhol, as impersonal and mocking as his work is. New York is a lot more regressive than Los Angeles in the sense that it is still a painting town.

Collectors don't want to deal with how my paintings are painted. When the issue does come up, it seems to go in one ear and out the other. My method blows everything they are into. Art is a so-called truthful activity. You constantly have to lie in everyday life. If you've got to lie when you're making art, for Chrissake why be making art?

Ashley Bickerton

Born 1959, Barbados, West Indies. Studied at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, BFA 1982; Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, New York. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, 1992. Forthcoming show at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, fall 1993.

When I was a senior at Cal Arts, Jack Goldstein came out from New York and gave a great talk. He made it clear that he hired people to do much of his work. Even seeing the paintings in slides, I thought I could do them better, since I've always been skilled as an illustrator. So I went up to him afterwards and said that I was moving to New York and could do his paintings better than they were being done. He said, "Yeah, yeah, call me up when you get there."

As soon as I arrived in New York I called Jack up. It happened that he had been trying out one of his students from Hartford, who was very good technically, but too slow or too fussy for his satisfaction. Jack wanted it hard and fast, no emotional niggling or technical flourishes, just get it on and get it out. He gave me a 12-foot-long canvas and a 3-by-5-inch photograph and said, "Do this

one. You can do it. And if you can't, you can't." Looking at this tiny photograph and this enormous blank canvas awaiting the image I felt terrified. It was a trial by fire, but I managed it to his satisfaction. So I was working for him within a week of arriving in New York in the fall of 1982.

On the first paintings we had disagreements on push and pull. He just wanted white to be laid on black in a very cold manner; I understood the notion conceptually, but visually I felt it left his paintings less inviting to the contemplation of the ideas that he was putting forth. I wanted to play back and forth between black and white to make a more potent image. I think I won that one, because we went on to do it that way. He had just gotten a grant so he was ready to roll, and I was really gung ho and very ambitious.

A lot of that went into Jack's studio. I was willing to push hard and keep pushing. I wanted to do something that would be more interesting for me, wanted to leave an imprint of some kind, if only for my own private gratification. I was eager to try new things, like using color or changing the imagery. But at no time did I operate outside the conceptual framework that he set up for his work.

Jack was very devoted to his art; he wanted it to be right. Some paintings took a day, some a month. I remember working on a cloud bank, and Jack coming in and, not realizing how slow that sort of painting is, being pissed off that I had finished so little. Other times he was impressed when it appeared I was working quickly. He often did the things that an assistant normally would do: he went to Pearl Paint, stretched and gessoed the canvases, swept up, whatever it took so the paintings got finished.

I worked for him for four years, three ten-hour days a week, pressured in so we could get more done at a stretch. That's how I run my studio now. Four years of production like that of stuff that wasn't mine was hard, but I had to do it because I knew it was something that would take me somewhere, and I could give him something in return. We had really healthy discussions. Jack was immensely analytic about his process and knew his stuff. I got a great sense of the issues of the '60s and '70s from him. If I goofed off on the phone it would piss him off, but we could spend three hours having a discussion, and that was fine.

With Jack it was almost a matter of pride for me not to be publicly credited, since I wanted to be as rigorous as he was to show that I knew my role there. It was enough that his friends knew I could do the paintings and do them well. But he sometimes seemed to worry that I might become too much of a personality, cease to be a faceless technician. He hated my talking to people who came into the studio, and didn't want me going to his openings; he gave me really dirty looks when I showed up anyway. At the same time, Jack really believed in me and was very supportive of my work.

In '85 things started to happen for me, and in '86 I was able to quit working for Jack. It was the happiest moment of my professional life, because I could finally do my own work full-time. The elation lasted precisely a week before working for myself became a job. Around then Sonnabend Gallery came into the picture and gave me a small stipend, and I put a chunk of it into hiring my first assistant, Mark Dion, who was a peer. I had met him through Jack, with whom he had studied. Mark had once helped me install my work and done an amazing job. He took on the organizational tasks, doing the ordering, phoning, running around, making sure that everything got done. I concentrated on the technical stuff, like laying on the type, doing all the graphics and the airbrushing.

As more money came in, other people started working in my studio. I've always tried to avoid hierarchies, since we are around the same age and are all working hard together. But I hit a burnout period after I did the first "Landscape" show at Sonnabend and lost interest in the work. Mark and Bill Schefferine put together and installed the second and third versions of those pieces, using the systems we had established. Mark ended up feeling, quite rightfully, that he was doing all the work without me, and that this was just another job and I just another boss. So he quit. When I hire assistants, I look for people with a lot of character who are going somewhere themselves and I'm just a stepping stone; those are the ones who've worked out best.

I produced very high-finish objects before I could afford to have anyone work for me. But I couldn't do what I do now on my own, because the pieces are much too labor-intensive. Assistants may be like a drug you become addicted to and feel you can't do without. Of course I could do without them. I would just produce less and make smaller pieces that I could lift myself. Ultimately I feel I'm moving toward an art where fabricators and assistants are not necessary but can be utilized as needed. I want to have the geographic mobility and the economy of means of a travel writer.

When I give a lecture people often ask what I mean when I say, "We decided." Almost everything in the studio is done in a democratic way. When something new comes up, I'll stop everybody, and we'll all talk about where the ideas can be taken. If both my assistants disagree vociferously with me, and I'm convinced I'm right, then I'm right. If both disagree vociferously and I'm not sure, then they're right. And if it is more on the gray scale we talk. I operate mostly as the central processing unit connecting the signals coming in to the messages going out.

Mark Dion

Born 1961, New Bedford, Mass. Studied at School of the Visual Arts, New York, 1982–84; Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, 1985; University of Hartford, Conn., 1985. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Institute of Contemporary Art, London, fall 1992.

Jack Goldstein encouraged me to move from Hartford to New York in 1982. I earned my living as an art restorer. Ashley Bickerton and I met through Jack and became friends. When Ashley started making some money in '86, he asked me to come on board. He was led to hire me by some of the elements he saw in my work; I didn't have to prove myself to him as an artist. I had a certain facility and knew a lot about chemicals. We had read many of the same books, spoke the same language, could make assumptions about each other's education. We would start at 1 P.M. and work until 11 three days a week. That schedule allowed me to pay attention to what I was doing on my own, as well. I was Ashley's studio assistant; there were times when I might do something else for him, but it was clearly done as a favor and he was very apologetic about it. I mention this because I had worked one day for a painter, who had me buy some paint, pick up his laundry and get his watch repaired. I worked with Ashley until '90, quitting when I could make it on my own work.

In the beginning we did everything ourselves, all the technical work. There was an exchange going on; influence in that situation flows both ways. Even though he paid the bills it wasn't a hierarchical arrangement. He used people to the best of their abilities. That didn't mean using just their hands or their muscles, but using their brains as well. While he and I don't take the same position, we have a lot of the same interests, so it was always very stimulating. I was generally the one installing his work.

Then Bill Schefferine got hired, and that freed me up to do more research work. I researched the continental origins of a bunch of plants for a piece Ashley did involving different seeds. I looked at what was out there in terms of a technical vernacular that I thought would be of interest, that we could actually use. I had a whole file, which I constantly increased, of things that I imagined Ashley might be interested in. But the file was rarely helpful, because my predictions of where the work would go weren't where Ashley ended up going. The tendencies I saw were there, but weren't the tendencies he was interested in.

He was very professional as an employer, very frank, very honest; he paid you regularly and extremely well. If someone came into the studio, Ashley would introduce you as an artist who was working with him; he would

***"Jack gave me a 12-foot canvas and a 3-by-5-inch photo and said, 'Do this one. You can do it. Or if you can't, you can't.' "*—Ashley Bickerton**

***"I don't know who I am when I don't work, so it wouldn't make sense for me to delegate any significant aspect of the making."*—Dorothea Rockburne**

make clear that this was a temporary stop for you and that you had your own thing going. When he talked to critics, collectors or dealers you were always included in the conversation. You have to appreciate that. We had very different ideas about what being an artist meant; he had realized his. I learned that I didn't want to be that sort of artist, that I had to invent myself in a different way. At that time Ashley believed the commercial gallery system to be the highest expression of what was possible now. The more I saw of that system, the more I wanted to step back from it and create situations on my own terms.

We had a very playful relationship. Ashley took endless pleasure in making me upset, and he really knew how. He would say these ridiculous things that would set me off on a diatribe. He convinced you that his work was good and allowed you to feel that you and he were working toward something collectively. He was able to do that, because his art is exciting and because he had worked out his own ideas very openly, so you understood connections in the work which otherwise might have seemed eccentric.

I learned about how psychologically needy collectors are, about what they expect and desire. It doesn't matter how far we have come, it doesn't matter how much we do to destroy the concept, they always want to see the genius in the studio. Some aspects of the art world were so discouraging that I don't know if I would have gone on had Ashley not been so encouraging. Most of the other artists' assistants I knew stopped, decided that being an artist might not be such a good thing. By staying at the center of what he was doing, Ashley showed that he believed art was a test field for ideas, debate and discourse, that we are not doing this for glamour or money.

I don't think I'd really like to have an assistant myself, though it would be great to have someone handle some of the time-wasting work. I don't know if I could trust anyone enough to let them make decisions. That's an opinion that results from my having been an assistant: you see that there are some things in the decision-making process that it's better to remain on top of all the time.

For me the process of making art isn't an industrial process. You learn a lot along the way, especially in relation to research. I find some facts, file them in my head and come back to them two or three years later. If you allow someone else to do part of the work, even on the production side, you lose that privileged knowing. In the end, it's important for me to do the stuff myself.

Ellen Driscoll

Born 1953, Boston. Studied at Wesleyan University, BA 1974; Columbia University, MFA 1980. Currently lives in Boston. Most recent solo exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 1992. Presently working on a "Memorial Grove" for Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Mass., 1993.

When I moved to New York I was looking for role models because I felt I was in uncharted waters as far as living and working as a woman artist. I made a very conscious decision to work for women to see who they were and how they did it. I worked for Alice Adams from 1978 to 1979, for Ursula von Rydingsvard from 1979 to 1980 and for Mary Miss from 1982 to 1983. I usually worked one or two days a week and was paid around $5 an hour. I found Alice and Ursula through Claire Tankel's Urban Corp Program run from the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs in New York. If you were awarded financial aid from a school in New York you could apply for an assistantship through the Urban Corp. They maintained a file of artists who had received New York State Council grants and who were interested in having a free assistant—we were paid by the city. You would go through the slide file, choose whom you were interested in and then call him or her. The student could interview several artists before making a decision. When I worked for Alice and Ursula I was their only assistant.

Alice taught me a lot of woodworking techniques: I learned some joinery, how to laminate and how to make a three-dimensional form from flat patterns. With Ursula I got further into lamination and began using a table saw and grinders. I hadn't known a thing about wood; they trained me, and I now use those techniques in my own work. With Mary I was more involved with office work.

Alice and Ursula each had a child and was earning a living. They were also making art and exhibiting. I was impressed with their sense of discipline, not to mention the fullness of their lives. That was probably the deepest lesson I learned from them. All three women were generous with their contacts and support; I felt very appreciated. I was startled that they would be so respectful of me when I was not the least bit important to them. I wanted to emulate that attitude.

My first assistant, Joan Giroux, was someone who approached me on the street—though I had known her at Parsons. She said she wanted to be my assistant if I ever decided to have one. After I hired her, she took the initiative and organized my life. Then she moved to Germany. Zero Higashida started working with me in the spring of 1988 as I was preparing for my second show at Damon Brandt. I found him through Judith Shea, whose assistant, Kazumi Tanaka, was a friend of his. Zero didn't speak much English so we communicated through drawings. I had an idea for a sculpture that I didn't know how to execute technically. I managed to ask him if he knew how to go about doing the work; together we strip-laminated the piece. After that experience, which was largely nonverbal, I was convinced that he was a terrific person for me to work with. I've never been that interested in training someone to do something. I prefer to see what kind of skills they have that I don't have and then see how these skills complement my own. With Zero it got to be almost collaborative because he brought abilities to my work that I probably wasn't ever going to develop; he is very exacting, and I am not.

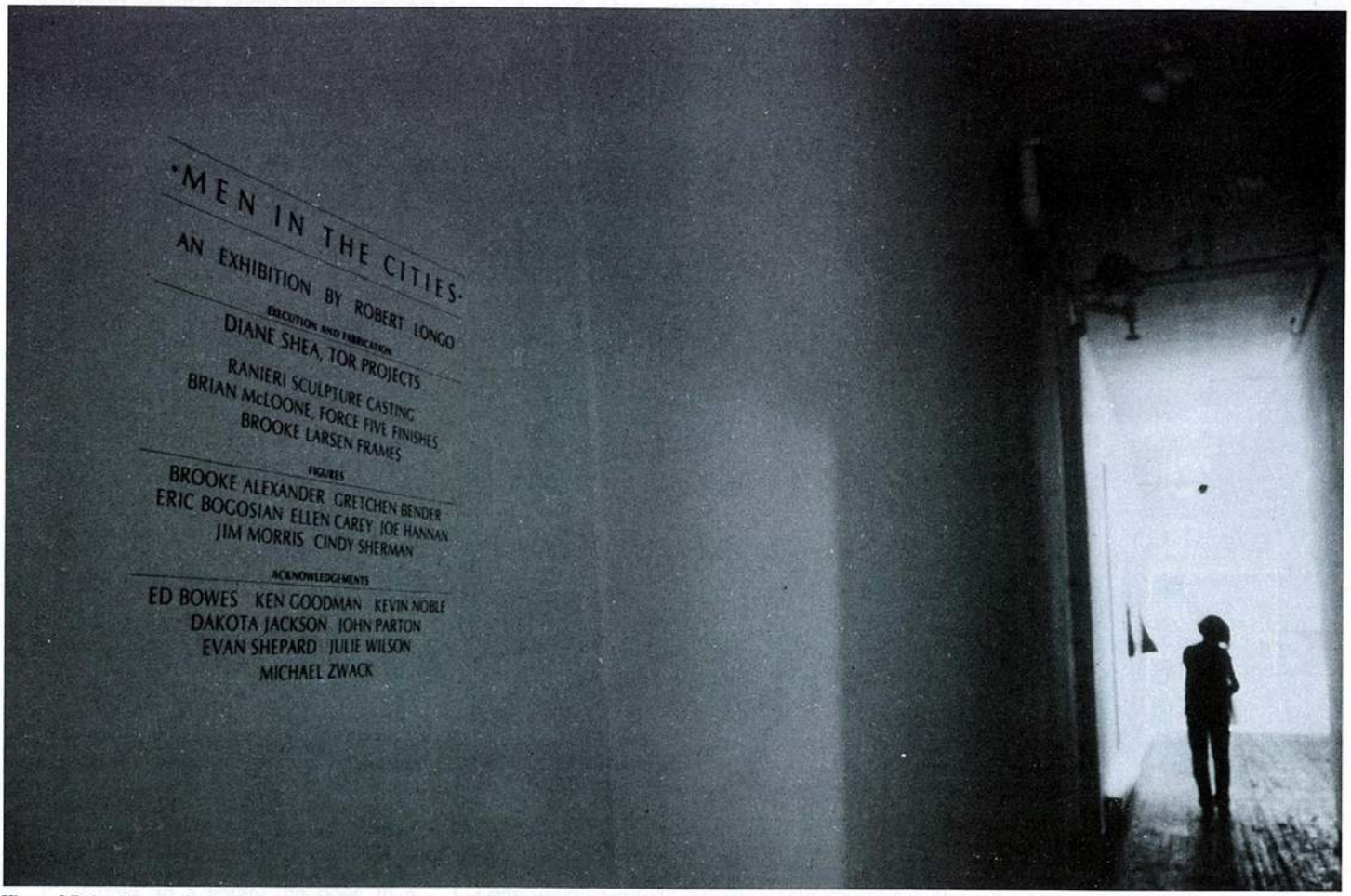
The significant shift for me between 1988 and 1990 was that as assistants started doing many of the tedious tasks, I was able to have a lot more freedom in terms of decision-making. Therefore I was able to take more risks. I could invest hours of their labor in something and if it wasn't working, I could just cut the piece in half. When it was only me, I was reluctant to tear into something that I had been working on for a long time. This new freedom really brought a spurt of growth into my work. Also I've always felt that some of the really significant developments in my work have occurred because of the complementary abilities that my assistants have brought to specific problems. I am very loyal and bonded to them and will do almost anything to help them—and they know that.

Robert Longo

Born 1953, Brooklyn. Studied at SUNY College, Buffalo, BFA 1975. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, Salzburg, fall 1992. Forthcoming show at Metro Pictures, New York, spring 1993.

In 1975 I was living in Buffalo and found this studio in a building where Charlie Clough was working; Michael Zwack took a studio there as well. Charlie came up with this idea of doing an alternative space in the hallway that connected all our studios. "Hallwalls" seemed like the obvious name for the space. Charlie, Michael, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Dwyer and I would brainstorm for exhibition ideas, and then Charlie and I would go to New York and knock on people's doors. I first started working for artists by putting up their shows; working for an artist was the best thing possible. They would come to Buffalo for between two days and a week; we would have them trapped and could do a kind of brain drain, really learning their heads. The last show I curated included Matt Mullican, Paul McMahon, David Salle, Troy Brauntuch and Jack Goldstein. I edited together some films for Jack—he was a great advocate of having other people do your work; he taught me about conceptual distance. With that show I realized that my time was up, that I should go to New York and do my thing.

When I got to New York in 1977 I started working for Vito Acconci, whom I had met



View of Robert Longo's "Men in the Cities" exhibition at Metro Pictures, 1981, with fabricators, models and assistants prominently credited.

through Hallwalls. I worked for him on and off for a year building pieces and doing installations; I learned much of how to be an artist from him. He would talk to you a lot; I liked being paid to be there for him to bang ideas off of. You saw how he put things together. I ended up quitting Vito for two reasons: I wanted to spend more time doing my own work, and also his work had started to get much more technical, so I was insisting that he get real technical people to work for him, people who knew that shit.

Next, it happened that the woman who was handling video and performance at The Kitchen was going away to India for three months, and she asked if I could take over for her. She ended up getting sick in India, so I was at The Kitchen for seven months. Again I was working for people by putting their stuff on. I basically brought my friends in, a lot of whom I had met through Hallwalls. 1977–78 seemed like the changing of the guard; the replacement generation had arrived.

I was scheduled to do an exhibition and performance at The Kitchen in early '79. There was a drawing that was just way too big in terms of the time I had available. I met this woman named Diane Shea, who was a professional illustrator. I showed her the charcoal and graphite technique I was using in my drawings. She helped me finish the large drawing, and has worked for me off and on in the 13 years since. I then did a lot of sculpture for a group show in Houston and ended up around $15,000 in debt, so I realized that I'd better go back to drawings for my first show at Metro. I wanted to work faster, so Diane and I would work on the drawings together; she would do the hair and the wrinkles in the shirts, and I would do the fine-tuning and filling in of the black areas. The big drawings could get finished in a month instead of two. I knew she knew exactly how I wanted to draw things; it was an incredible feeling, because I felt like I was working through her. But we approached the act of drawing very differently: she would watch the line exactly where she was drawing, while I would watch where the line was going. I always had to remind myself how different her own art was from mine. Working with an assistant helped me extend the drawings past the intimacy of drawing.

Jim Sheppard, who is now a painter out in L.A., was crucial to my studio for a long time. His knowledge of techniques and craftsmen was extraordinary. When you work with someone very good they tend to raise the level of your work because of the respect you have for their technical abilities. The people you continue to work with long-term, whether in the studio or as outside fabricators, you work with because you enjoy them as people and enjoy their input. When other assistants first started working for me, we all talked about having to have a time limit; other than Jim and Diane, the longest anyone worked was three years. I had a wave of exceptional younger artists come to work for me in the early '80s. They did everything from running to get videotapes to building pieces. But in a weird way I was more interested in talking to

***"I was trying to make art the way people made movies, with everyone getting credit for what they did."*—Robert Longo**

Operation Mongoose (Suspended from this grand piano, which appears in Salvador Dalí's painting, *Le Concert ou Le piano rouge ou L'orchestre rouge*, 1957, is the electronic circuitry from an *Ice* clock radio that was paired with a digital timer to detonate the bomb which exploded aboard Pan American flight 103 on December 21st, 1988. The clock was purchased at the Huma-Markt department store in Neuss, Germany by Hafez Dalkamouni and the bomb's maker, Marwan Khreesat on October 24, 1988. Framing the circuitry is the silhouette of the headboard of Jack Ruby's bed. Ruby was the owner of two Dallas strip-tease clubs, the Carousel Club and the Vegas Club, and assassin of Lee Harvey Oswald. George Senator, Ruby's roommate, testified to the Warren Commission that at about 10:15 a.m. on Sunday morning, November 24, 1963, Ruby told him that: "If something happened to this person (Lee Harvey Oswald), then Mrs. Kennedy won't have to come back for the trial." About one hour later, as police were transferring Oswald from the city jail to the Dallas County jail, Ruby shot Oswald point blank with a Colt Cobra .38 caliber pistol. This pistol is now valued at over $100,000. Submerged in the piano is a plaque with a passage from the Holy Koran. Marwan Khreesat purchased this plaque in Cologne, Germany just after his arrival in Neuss on October 13. Translated from the Arabic, the passage reads: "*Say: He is God, one, God, the everlasting refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to him is not anyone.*" He hung this plaque in the entrance of the greengrocery at 16 Isarstrasse in Neuss which was owned by Dalkamouni's brother-in-law Hashem Abassi. Using the apartment just above the greengrocery, Khreesat assembled 4 complete bombs, and wired one other. The 4 complete bombs were confiscated by the German Bundeskriminalamt on October 26th during Operation Autumn Leaves as a result of Khreesat's turned allegiance to Jordanian intelligence. The 5th bomb was saved from this raid by Ramzi Diab, who carried it from Germany to Syria by train on October 29th. In Damascus Diab was apprehended by Ahmed Jibril, Leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP—GC), who believed him to be working for the Mossad—Israeli Intelligence. Two forged Israeli passports found on Diab, confirmed Jibril's suspicion. Investigators speculate that the incomplete bomb Diab carried was taken to Libya and handed over by the PFLP—GC to Mohammed al-Makoussi, Ibrahim Twafik-Youssef and Hassan Hadi al-Ahar, the freelance terrorists known as the "Kenya Three." An assumption to be made is that in collaboration with other terrorists, including the two Libyans, Lamen Khalifa Fhimah and Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, the "Kenya Three" completed Khreesat's bomb and loaded it as unaccompanied baggage aboard a feeder flight in Malta that connected with Pan Am 103 in Frankfurt, Germany. Speaking of the emancipatory power of his "paranoiac-critical method" Salvador Dalí announced nearly thirty years before he painted the *Le Concert ou Le piano rouge ou L'orchestre rouge*: "I believe that the moment is at hand when, by a paranoiac and active effort of the mind, it will be possible to systematize confusion and thus help to discredit the world of reality."), 1991.

A Ronald Jones work, the full title of which appears above. Photo E. Wilson. Courtesy Metro Pictures.

them, in having them around the studio, than in the actual work they did for me.

It was my work because the ideas were mine. Then we would sit around trying to figure out ways of making the pieces. Each work became this kind of complicated technical quest to find the best materials and the best way to get this thing done. It was like I was the car designer, and then all these other people would actually have to build the car and get it to run. I always got really nervous about what I might be stealing from the artists working for me. I think whatever I took they probably got back. Part of an assistant's job is to really know how to make your work; unfortunately, when they really know is when they usually quit.

I was adamant about taking a position against all this bullshit painting, the heroic, fake European stuff. I felt that the whole return of painting went along with Reagan and his talk about returning to traditional American values. For a while I thought that I was trying to make art the way people made movies, with everyone getting credit for what they did. By utilizing assistants and acknowledging their role in the work, I was, in part, trying to cash in on the shock value. I would silk-screen the names of all the people who had helped me create each exhibition on the wall. My dealers were a little reluctant about this, since I was almost throwing it in people's faces. To a certain extent it backfired, with viewers often talking about how things got made, not what they were. If you look at where Jeff Koons has taken things, that approach has become completely accepted: one pursues ideas by whatever means necessary.

Being an artist is a privilege, being able to be successful as an artist is an opportunity. You have to take the opportunity of being successful and invest in the privilege of being an artist. I felt the money I made from the work was meant to go back into the work. That was a mistake, in that I basically fronted the money for everything I made, so if the pieces didn't sell I got stuck with the expenses, which were often considerable. Now, if I get involved with a project, I try to insist on a budget, with some money earmarked to pay an assistant or two. That way we are all working for the client; the assistants get paid more, and their responsibilities are clearly delineated.

Around five years ago I realized that I had gotten further away from the actual work than I wanted; since then I've tried to do as many things as I can myself, both to have more control and to better know why I'm doing it. I have a lot more knowledge than before. I'm also trying to be more patient; before I was trying to make a masterpiece every time; now I realize that you sometimes have to make a lot of junk to get the good pieces. I would love to limit myself to something simple and direct, like painting.

Ronald Jones

Born 1952, Falls Church, Va. Studied at Huntington College, Huntington, Ala., BFA 1974; University of South Carolina, Columbia, MFA 1976; Ohio University, Athens, PhD 1981. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Galerie Gilles Peyroulet, Paris, October 1992. Forthcoming exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, spring 1993.

My first assistant, Elizabeth Peyton, was someone who came up to me after a lecture I did at the School of Visual Arts in 1987. She told me I was completely disorganized and should have an assistant and she was it. So I hired her on the spot. It was a good time for me to take on an assistant because my work was changing from simply replicating historical artifacts, like the Vietnam Peace Tables, for which the research aspect wasn't a strain, to trying to precisely nail down material that often is held in very particular archives or museums. She worked full-time for me for two years. Since I don't pay any attention to Monday through Friday, if something came to mind, I didn't think twice about calling her Sunday morning at nine to get over here. She organized everything in a clear and precise way and was very good in terms of gathering information. She left in 1989 to take a full-time job as a photo researcher.

***"My stuff has never been about the artist's hand (except in the beginning, when that hand was dressing my penis in doll's clothes)."*—Vito Acconci**

A few months later a young man named Paul Myoda came up to me and said he wanted to work for me, which was quite flattering. We talked two or three times about the job; I realized that he could both handle the research and represent a point of view that would check my own. I told him the first day that the last thing he could afford was to become known as my assistant. He had to be sure to have his own life, his own career, his own position as an artist.

It is not a collaborative relationship, because I am the one who puts my name on the bottom line. But it isn't a conventional artist/assistant relationship either, since he freely offers his opinion about each project at every level from the very beginning. I may have an idea about how we should approach a particular project, and Paul, as often as not, has a different plan of attack. Rarely do we combine the two ideas; rather, mine or his takes precedence.

Usually it goes about like this: I say, "These things seem interesting. Go and find out as much as you can about them." We blind-shoot at subjects, cast very broad nets, look for and at a lot of different topics assuming we are only going to recover 20 or 30 percent of what we are actually seeking, because the things sought are so exotic. At his age I literally would have gone out to the library. But Paul has set up these systems so things come to him by mail, by phone or by fax. If he goes to a library, he goes to a particular one for a particular reason. Otherwise he's on the phone most of the time. It's amazing the things people will tell you or give you without questioning your reasons for wanting them. People typically are very helpful. Because of the nature of the titles that we use, which are really extended text panels, the information has to be very specific.

For example, I found out a little tidbit of information—that a greenhouse company in Maryland provided the glass eyepieces for World War I gas masks. Paul got to work. Not only did we get hold of a gas mask and find out where it came from, but it turned out that the greenhouse company had purchased thousands of old Mathew Brady glass negatives in the 1880s, bleached them out and reused the glass in various ways. Brady had died a pauper, and no one really wanted to be reminded of the Civil War, so his family sold the negatives to the highest bidder, which was the greenhouse company.

As one of my research projects unfolds, we talk about how and where it's going and brainstorm as to what's the best next step to take. We have between 30 and 50 researches going on at the same time; only some of them end up being made as pieces. Once we have a good idea of what's going to land in our hands, I propose that certain objects should go together and begin to make models of the sculptures out of balsa wood and hot glue. The models sit around the studio for several months, and we talk about them. I'm a very careful listener around Paul and, per his advice, will change certain things. I'll then write the first draft of the titles and give them to him to edit; they often go back and forth between us several times.

I have a similarly close relationship with my fabricator, Reed Karen, who has worked with me for five years. Reed, Paul and I talk together and decide how to scale things up from the models. Then Reed starts building the works. Sometimes during the production phase he will call up and say, "Instead of using this one material I used this other that I remembered you liked." He hasn't made a wrong decision yet, from my point of view.

I used to want to see everything that came into the office. Now, more and more, Paul edits the materials and loads my laptop with research summaries, which I can read through and edit on the days I have to be out of New York. Going back into the files I can see my thinking change: I'm looking at certain sets of things or certain objects, and then another object will enter the picture and everything shifts over slightly. This method also provides us with an ongoing register of the people we've had some sort of contact with. Paul organizes the computer and paper files so that we can put our fingers on research material instantly, and he maintains the phone logs. Sunday is the only day I don't see him.

I don't publicly credit my assistants. I just designed a park in Chicago. At the dedication I thanked everybody who worked on the project personally, but I didn't acknowledge them publicly. I was hired to do the park, and I take full responsibility, take all the good and all the bad. In every instance, at every level, I insist on making the decisions, and that extends back to my decision to hire my assistant, Paul. Those who drew up the research or built the pieces or brought all the elements into play are, finally, simply my assistants. If my assistants want to be artists, let them go out and be artists.

Jack Beal

Born 1931, Richmond, Va. Studied at College of William and Mary, 1950-53; Art Institute of Chicago, 1953-56. Currently lives in Oneonta, N.Y. Forthcoming solo exhibition at Frumkin/Adams Gallery, New York, spring 1993.

I was never anyone's assistant/apprentice, though I wish I had been. I'm envious of those artists who were apprentices. But in my generation—I'm 61—there weren't any that I knew of.

In 1968, someone from the Great Lakes Colleges Association called me up and asked if I wanted an intern as an apprentice. I said of course I did. So Walter Hatke came to work for me for five months. As a result, my work changed rather radically. For the first time in my life I did a "series" of paintings. I had dreamed of making a painting of a plain work table in our loft. The next thing I knew I had made 17 paintings of it, which I would not have done had I not had an apprentice. It was mostly hard-edge painting; I would draw the outlines on the canvas with a pencil and mix the colors and Walter would fill them in. I trusted him implicitly from the word go. He went back to school and then returned to New York after graduating. I hired him and gave him even more responsibility in painting on the pictures. He took on work that was deadly dull and boring, and God love him, he seemed to enjoy it. After Walter, my wife, Sondra Freckelton, and I kept being offered G.L.C.A. apprentices and we had another three or four.

In 1970 I briefly taught at San Diego State University and met a student named Dana van Horne. He came East that summer and stayed with us upstate. Over the next few summers he helped us rebuild an old mill. I encouraged him to attend the Whitney Museum's studio program and then Yale's graduate school. In 1974 I was offered the chance to do a mural-size painting (four canvases each 12½ feet square) for the Department of Labor in Washington. At that time I had an apprentice named Bob, but knew I needed a second person so in January 1975, I asked Dana to come work full-time.

The job was much bigger than anything I had ever attempted before, so my ego sort of washed away and I was able to accept suggestions from all over without being defensive. It was a kind of freedom I had never experienced. I mixed the colors. Bob, who had been a hard-edge painter and had never worked realistically, did all the hard-edge elements; Sondra painted the still-life stuff, Dana painted the landscapes and I did the figures. We all worked together in a 24-by-36-foot room; only one person could paint on a canvas at a time because they were so large that they bounced. It was a two-and-a-half year process; we worked mostly seven days a week. Some weeks we would take off Sunday mornings and go to town and intend to make a further excursion, but would usually end up coming home and, before I would know, someone would have slipped off to the studio and gone back to work. I paid Bob and Dana a modest monthly wage and gave them room and board; they ended up making more from the project than Sondra and I did. Every night one person would stop painting around 5 PM and prepare a gourmet meal for the rest of us. There was no possibility for Bob and Dana to do any of their own painting during the project; after a year and a half of working on the paintings Sondra returned to her own work.

I was terribly worried about influencing my apprentices too much, about them being marked by my esthetic. I told everyone in

***"When I started working larger and was cladding figures in metal, suddenly there was a mundane process that someone could do for me."*—Alison Saar**

advance, "Let's not try to paint like Jack Beal, let's try to paint like George Caleb Bingham, only even more anonymously than that." But of course the paintings ended up being Jack Beal paintings, primarily because of my imprint on the figures. The pictures wouldn't have been nearly as good without the time, energy and input of everyone else. We were all working toward a common goal, and knew that these pictures were going to go out and have a good effect on viewers because they were painted to celebrate the working people of America. We needed a motivation like that to keep up the intensity. At the end I worked on the paintings alone for three months to unify them.

I was a visiting artist at Kent State University one summer in the early '80s and met Dean Hartung, who was enrolled in the program. I did a painting called *The Painting Lesson* which shows Dean, his wife, Ellen, and myself looking out of the canvas at the viewer. In the background of the painting are 47 reproductions of old- and modern-master pictures, all of which I got Dean to paint as part of the ethos of the picture. I believe in painters making copies of old-master paintings. Dean later worked for me in New York helping with the paintings and stretching the crookedest canvases you ever saw. Once I moved up to the country permanently in the mid-'80s, I largely stopped having apprentices, since up here they need to rely on Sondra and me for far more than they do in New York. It can come to feel a bit invasive.

I love the whole idea of apprentices, love the benefits that all involved derive. It is one of those situations where everyone gives something but everyone gets something. In 1981, for example, when I was offered another major commission but didn't feel physically up to accepting it, I proposed Dana to the sponsor and he was awarded the commission, in part because, having worked on the labor murals, he understood the problems that large-scale work can entail.

Looking at the paintings of people who've worked with me, it is difficult to sort out who influenced whom. For example, Dana was so much in love with 17th-century Dutch painting that he transmitted that love to me, and my work changed quite a bit as a result, as I got heavily involved with genre work, which hadn't interested me before. I once said to Dana that the only thing I expected of him was that he get better than me. He got to be a better draftsman than me, and I then took it as a challenge to become as good as him. That stuff bounces back and forth. It is not a one-way street.

Dorothea Rockburne

Born Montreal, Quebec. Studied at Black Mountain College, N.C. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at d.p. Fong & Spratt Galleries, San Jose, Calif., November 1992.

Around 1967 I was doing metal paintings which I sprayed in a booth. Because they were heavy I had to have someone help me move them in and out of the booth. I didn't need anyone on a regular basis, but that's when I started thinking about working with studio assistants. I realized that if I was going to have studio assistants, my politics were art and the making of art. I want people to make art because it will be a better world. I proselytize art, an attitude that hasn't always been welcome in my studio. I want people to make art to the best of their ability, want to be as generous as possible with what I know. I'm a very good teacher, and I don't want to teach in a school.

Terry La Noue kept trying to get me to take on a regular studio assistant. Finally, in 1970, I just needed somebody to help me physically with things, so I hired Carroll Dunham, who was Terry's student. Carroll was eager, smart and open. After he went back to school, Mel Kendrick, who was a friend of Carroll's began to call me. Again I was hesitant to have anyone in the studio; it was hard for me in those days because I was very shy. I didn't want to order someone around, didn't always know what to give them to do, wasn't sure of the best way to get done what I needed done. But I really did need someone, and so I hired Mel.

I started throwing books at him and ways of using material and thinking about things that weren't current in the art vocabulary then. I was doing the carbon paper work when Mel started, and he tracked down the right kind of carbon paper and did a lot of the technical figuring-out. Mel went to Europe with me, and we traveled around doing installations. It was a wonderful growing period for both of us: he got to see Europe in a way that he hadn't before, and I worked with someone who spoke English and knew how to get things done. When I was doing an installation in Spoleto I discovered that the packer hadn't included the plastic sheet I needed. Knowing that something like that would be difficult to find locally, Mel took the next train to Rome, tracked down the right plastic and came back in time to do the installation. When Mel quit, Carroll came back to work for me.

Now I pretty much have two assistants. One handles the office, one the studio. I teach them those ordinary business skills which if you don't know your life is pure hell. The person helping in the studio is usually a man, since the job can involve a lot of heavy work moving crates and handling shipments. When I take someone on it is with the mutual understanding that they will stay three or four years, though it hasn't always worked out.

I am the only one to touch the work. I don't know who I am when I don't work, so it wouldn't make sense for me to delegate any significant aspect of the making. I have to do even the tedious stuff myself. I never ask my assistants' opinions about what I'm doing,

Jack Beal's wife, Sondra Freckelton, working on **Settlements,** *one of Beal's "History of Labor in America" murals, 1977.*

but then I never ask anyone's opinion about what I'm doing.

When I'm not totally involved in getting my own work done, I try to find out what may be stopping an assistant from doing his or her own work. It may mean turning someone away from something that really isn't their kind of work and pointing them toward another kind. Sometimes you have to gently plant the seed of personal change, you have to water the plant; when a problem arises you have to handle it carefully.

There is a whole severing period that I try to start around six months before an assistant leaves. After someone goes, it usually takes them a couple of years to get on their feet as artists. I actively try to keep up with what they are doing. When I feel their work is at a place where it could stand some help, I do a studio visit, look a long time, take a few days to think about it, then meet with them and tell them what I think. I've helped a number of my assistants get shows. There was a point when Carroll had some really excellent work and I brought a dealer from Greece over and he bought out the entire studio, which allowed Carroll to concentrate full-time on painting.

I like problem-solving; it is a matter for the assistant to adapt the skills I teach in problem-solving to their own problems. What I try to do when people are here is not to teach them to do what I do, but to teach them how to get away from everything they have been taught, how to really go through the process of thinking. I try to remain very flexible. Studio assistants now need different things than they used to. In some ways they are better trained, in some ways they are less well trained. My assistants take away every bit as much as they put in, if not more.

Vito Acconci

Born 1940, Bronx. Studied at Holy Cross College, Worcester, Mass., BA 1962; University of Iowa, Iowa City, MFA 1964. Currently lives in Brooklyn. Most recent solo exhibition at Osterreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, December 1992. Forthcoming exhibition at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, spring 1993.

I began working as a writer, so my working method was solitary: I was alone with a piece of paper—I didn't need anyone else, I needed only paper and pen and typewriter. My first work in an art context, in 1968–69, continued that method: I was alone with my own body, my own person. For a film or video, I could turn on the camera myself, then walk around and position myself in front of it: it was mind versus body versus camera. For audio work, I recorded everything myself. I used two four-channel reel-to-reel recorders plus a simple mixer, in a closet that functioned as a sound studio. There was no thought of bringing in technicians—these tapes were notes from the underground, voices from a deep throat.

Through the mid-'70s, when the pieces needed props and particular spatial conditions, construction was simple. Sometimes I gave the gallery or museum a rough diagram, or a verbal description, and a preparator would build a ramp, a wall: or I went out to buy rope ladders, bowling balls, roller skates, and then set these up in the exhibition space, with the help of other people. These people turned out to be next-generation artists. For example, in 1975, Robert Longo built an installation for me at Hallwalls in Buffalo; in 1976, I met Ken Feingold and David Salle at Cal Arts, where they were graduate students. Later, when they moved to New York, they worked for me; each, at different times, functioned as a jack-of-all-trades and a general researcher—we brooded together, argued with each other. We'd bring in other people for specific pieces—Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Michael Zwack; they would be at hand, on call—they'd rig up a cable-system, hang a steel weight out the window on the clocktower.

By the end of the '70s, building got more complicated; the work needed not floors and platforms but machines and vehicles. I worked on some pieces with Chuck Hoberman, a Cooper Union art student with engineering know-how; by now Chuck has become an accomplished and inventive engineer, but at that time he was just learning to solve structural and mechanical problems; we were floundering around. In the middle of one of those mixed-up periods, at P.S. 1 in 1979, I met John Tagiuri and Robert Price, who were building a Dennis Oppenheim piece nearby. They scared me at first; they seemed over-confident and aggressive, compared to Chuck's modesty. But they changed my attitude towards work. Their custom was to jump into the middle of things, to trouble-shoot and problem-solve. Before I met them, there were probably pieces I'll never know, pieces I avoided even thinking about because I assumed from the start that I couldn't do them. John and Robert gave at least the illusion that everything was possible; together we were fearless—we always asked for more. I worked with them for three years, and with John alone for three years after that; they insisted they weren't assistants—they were fabricators, I was their client.

Throughout the '80s, I thought of my stuff not as art but as architecture and furniture. It was appropriate that, in 1986, I met Ron Ervolino and Luis Vera, two former architecture students who were looking for alternatives to working in an architect's office. With them I started working more with models and drawings. They probably shamed me into rigor and analysis; I didn't have the luxury anymore of doing "play architecture," architecture-in-an-art-context; I had fallen into the world of practical codes and standards.

Until the end of the '80s, I worked with other people only at certain times, only for specific occasions. In 1988, when I had a show at MOMA I called "Public Places," the phrase seemed to act as an announcement, a reminder: I started getting more invitations to competitions, more calls for public-space proposals. From that time on, people have been working in my studio full-time. The studio has been set up as a place for tables: each table is a different geographical location, each table holds a model for a different project—as you go around the studio, you travel from Houston to Phoenix to Vienna. The number of people working changes according to available money; the tendency is to have people around with different orientations—Matthew Pickner came from an architecture background, Brownie Johnson came with the skills of an inventor.

The studio now has coalesced into three people: me, Luis Vera (the architect who has been there since 1986), and Jenny Schrider (who comes from an art-school background and who has worked with me since 1989). We work collaboratively. I might start things off with a basic general idea—a vague passing fancy—but we detail things together, and take projects into different directions once we work together. We work something like this: I visit a site and come back with slides; we build a site model, before ideas are definite; I present to them my first general idea and they criticize it—they hate it or take it further, elsewhere. When we're stuck we all concentrate on the site and try to understand it, derive starting points from it. Jenny and Luis challenge me, and I try to live up to them; I'm not sure what I do for them (you should be talking to them, too).

Various workers have come in and out: interns during the course of a semester, extra people when a deadline approaches. But basically it's the three of us; Luis and Jenny work *with* me—the people who come in and out work *for* us. The studio is a kind of think tank, a place for models and theory. We rarely build actual pieces at the studio; some small things sometimes—recently a sex-doll project, a mask project. Most pieces are given to a contractor—Ed Batcheller, David Kennedy. In the same way I work with Jenny and Luis, the three of us work with a contractor: if a problem is brought up (budget, technical availability, codes), we all work together to try to make it part of the piece.

The people who work with and for me are, of course, given public credit. Sometimes that causes a problem for galleries; a fabricator is one thing, but a near-collaborator is something else—it breaks down notions of the individual artist, and therefore interferes with standards of value, especially economic value. Galleries will list credits, but they'd rather do it off to the side: a sheet of paper,

***"I bounce possibilities around with my assistants; I want to be sure that my ideas make sense to the people who are going to see the work."*—Fred Wilson**

***"With our assistants we had to deal with all those personalities. One would start crying. And they were lazy."*—McDermott & McGough**

say, at the reception desk, where only someone searching might bother to look. For me what has to be there is a wall sign that counters the dominance of my name: "designed and engineered by Luis Vera and Jennifer Schrider, with the assistance of so-and-so and so-and-so."

But it's more than a simple matter of a sign. After a recent opening, one assistant was depressed because I had been seated at a table with dealers and critics, while the people working with me were far away at a different table. All the while, as we work on projects, we talk and think as "we"; now, suddenly, it was clear that it wasn't "we" anymore—the pieces were mine (and probably the dealer's), and Jenny and Luis had been there only to help the works into existence. If Luis and Jenny and I go on working together—and I hope we do—there has to be a real change in authorial structure. We have to tie into the tradition of an architect's office: "So-and-so Studio," "So-and-so, Architects," "So-and-so and Associates," or all three names together. In the case of an architect, it's clear that he or she doesn't do it alone (though museum shows of architecture are now plunging architects into the solo-artist myth). The way it is now, billed as "Vito Acconci," the work is too much mine; and it isn't all mine—it would be different work if these particular people weren't working with me. I have bad dreams about my pieces all the time; and the people working with me have bad dreams about them, too; if they're going to have bad dreams and problems, they should have fame and distribution, too. The way it is now, a distinction is maintained between "me" and "them," between my work and their work (and maybe they want it that way); so, when they get too wrapped up in my work, it interferes with their own. I worry that there has to come a time when, for their own preservation, they have to leave. (I worry also that I can never pay them enough; they can always earn more money working for a toy company or a corporate design office.)

Since all available money is spent on work and people working, it turns out that I do all the secretarial work myself; I end up doing what most artists hire other people for. I function as organizer and summarizer. A lot of us whose work began in the late '60s thought of ourselves as something like movie directors: we could arrange and organize the skills of others. My stuff has never been about the artist's hand (except in the beginning, maybe, when that hand was masturbating or dressing my penis in doll's clothes); there's been no reason to do things myself—there's been reason, in fact, to do the opposite, in order to devalue the artist's hand. And there's another reason not to do things myself: there's nothing I can do particularly well. But one thing I *can* do is use the Yellow Pages—I can find people to act as my hands, and as the better part of my mind. I can't think of these people as assistants: either they're collaborators, like Jenny and Luis, or they're specialists or technicians or handypersons brought in for particular jobs and consultations.

Annette Lemieux

Born 1957, Norfolk, Va. Studied at University of Hartford, Conn., BFA 1980. Currently lives in Boston. Most recent solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Italy, December 1992. Forthcoming traveling exhibition, Wellesley College Museum, Mass., 1994.

When I first moved to New York in 1981, I needed a job and called up everybody; I had nothing to lose. I worked for Matt Mullican for a week because I needed money, but traded for art instead, then I worked for Troy Brauntuch for a bit and for Longo on one project. People were eager to help you out. When I called Gary Stephan, he said he didn't really have anything for me to do but I could organize his record albums. I was briefly employed by Julian Schnabel. With him, you were not just his assistant, you were part of his family and were included in everything. It was nice on the one hand, but hard on the other because I was searching for and needing my own identity. I worked on drawings for Jack Goldstein for a month. When that didn't work out, I called David Salle, from whom I had taken a drawing class at the Hartford Art School, though I didn't know him all that well. I ended up working two or three days a week for David from 1981 through either '84 or '85.

I did prep work, stretched and gessoed canvases, went for supplies and objects, did some domestic work. I painted a ground once, but it didn't work out. I tend to paint very clean and minimal, and David doesn't; it was like two conflicting styles going on. He didn't ask me what I thought of things, and I kept my opinions to myself, though when I loved something I would say so. Working there I learned about the art world; any romance I had had about it was totally destroyed. David just worked a lot, and that somehow defined for me what it took. It was good that my art was very different from his: when an assistant's work is similar to yours it can be problematic.

I would work my days and leave and not deal with David's studio until the next week rolled around. He tried to make things easy. If I showed up dead on my feet from doing my own stuff he would give me a stupid job like redoing his address book. In 1984 David chose me for this "Three Artists Choose Three Artists" show at Artists Space. A certain amount of clout came from that: some people, who before would not have taken a second look at my name, were impressed. That show helped me move on, and it was time. If you are seen as being an assistant in someone's studio, you can risk being regarded as an assistant for life. And I was getting older and felt I needed health insurance and all that crap. With David it remained artist/assistant, it never became friend/buddy, so it's not like I call him or he calls me now.

I've had assistants since 1987, but only started having assistants working hands-on when I moved up to Boston in 1989, which is also when I started doing more sculptural work. A teacher friend of mine up here knew I needed an assistant and put me in touch with a student he thought was very good. Now my part-time assistant works on most everything—researching, gofering and doing the mechanical aspects of some of the sculptural pieces—allowing me to concentrate on making decisions. With an assistant I can realize pieces quicker. I don't let anybody touch the two-dimensional work; there is too much interpretation that can go on, and I still haven't found someone who knows how to stretch a canvas properly.

I treat my assistants differently than I was treated, but that may be because I am a woman. I tend to be more of the mother, tend to be more nurturing, worry when they are too tired. I sometimes have to take a step back to avoid getting too involved in their lives and problems and trying to make things better for them. I get about an inquiry a month from people who like my work and want to be my assistant. Most of the people that I've hired are women, and I think that has to do with the fact that I felt I'd been bumped out of jobs because I was a woman.

Sometimes, when I'm totally stressed out, I'll ask my assistant her opinion. It's like you want someone to say, "Yeah, it looks great." Even that can be problematic if they are coming to the piece from a different place and think it's going to a different place. Assistants never feel free to say what they really think. I would have a problem if someone walked in and said, "God, I really hate the stuff you've been working on." Being critical in that way would interfere with their role of being supportive. I've had personality conflicts with earlier assistants, and they're not working for me now.

When you have someone in the studio, you keep on giving them these stupid jobs until real jobs come up because you don't want to lose them. Assistants are hard to replace because of the loyalty and trust that tends to develop. My assistant works certain hours on certain days. I count on her coming in just as she counts on my being here. I would like the assistant I have now to be full-time. But at the same time that she is helping me, it can be an intrusion into that poetic space you need. As much as I value my assistant, I sometimes would rather have the Invisible Woman working for me.

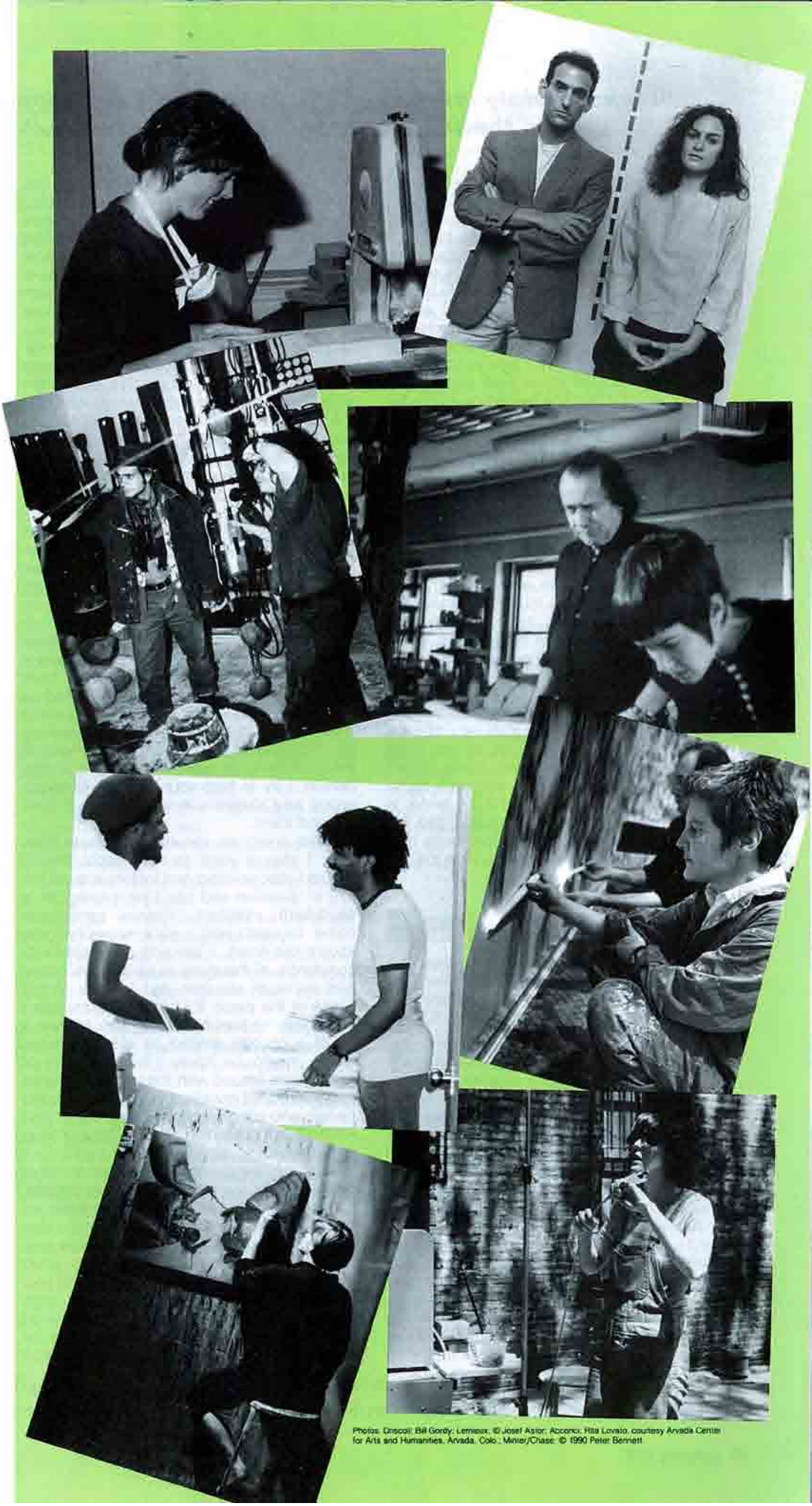
Alison Saar

Born 1956, Los Angeles. Studied at Scripps College, Claremont, Calif., BA 1978; Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, MFA 1981. Currently lives in Brooklyn. Most recent solo exhibition at Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, November 1992. Forthcoming exhibition at High Museum, Atlanta, summer 1993.

When I was 13, I started working for my father, who had been an artist until he started doing art conservation to support our family. It was a classic sort of apprenticeship: I would go to his shop every day after school, sweep the floors, wash the dishes and make sure everything was cleaned and prepped. While he was working on a series of large Chinese lacquered screens, he taught me to do a very light cleaning with solvents, which took hours and hours. Next he had me bring up surfaces with filler. Then he started me on simple retouching; he would mix the colors, and I learned to apply them under his close supervision. After that I would do small areas on my own. Finally he let me carry some projects all the way through. As a restorer you have to stay within boundaries. I worked with my father for 11 years, and had some clients of my own by the end. After college I earned my living restoring non-Western sculpture. A lot of what I learned doing conservation has since come into play in my own work.

In high school I started working for my mother, Betye Saar, on a project-by-project basis. She would have all these components that needed assembling, and I was comfortable with power tools, good at making things and really interested in three-dimensional work. I might dowel together boxes, or mount hinges, or tie up sticks in a particular way. She would be there, eyeing things, placing elements, telling me to stick something down here or there. Ideas were really stressed. Her interest in the spiritual came to inform my work. My younger sister still works for my parents—two days a week for my father and three for my mother. They pay her a better wage than I pay my assistants. Since art was around me from when I was really young, I never thought of it as a business. Now I just want to spend my time in the studio, so it's hard for me to deal with the commercial aspects of having a career. My mother always said it would take care of itself, but I'm not so sure.

For a long time I was uncertain about hiring



From top to bottom, left to right, Ellen Driscoll working in Alice Adams's studio; David Salle and assistant Annette Lemieux, early '80s; Ashley Bickerton and assistant Roddy Bogawa, 1992; Vito Acconci with assistant Jenny Schrider, 1992; Fred Wilson and assistant Sol Sax, 1992, at the Hillwood (Long Island) Art Museum; Ann Hamilton working on accountings, 1992, at the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; assistant Cassy Clark working on Marilyn Minter's "100 Food Porn" TV commercial, 1990; Marilyn Minter working for Kenneth Snelson, 1978.

Photos: Driscoll: Bill Gordy; Lemieux: © Josef Astor; Acconci: Rita Lovato, courtesy Arvada Center for Arts and Humanities, Arvada, Colo.; Minter/Chase: © 1990 Peter Bennett

***"I was terribly worried about influencing my apprentices too much, about them being marked by my esthetic."*—Jack Beal**

an assistant because I was working small and the pieces weren't terribly labor-intensive, so I didn't know how someone could help me. Then I started working a bit larger and was cladding the figures in copper or tin sheeting; all of a sudden here was a mundane process that someone could do for me. I sent information to Claire Tankel at the Urban Corp and asked around schools, but never got a response. Finally a woman who was on a Fulbright from England called me. She was interested in the work and we had similar sensibilities; she helped cover the figures.

After the birth of my son things slowed down, but then I had to finish a bunch of pieces for a traveling show that I was having with my mother. I really needed an assistant because, with the baby, my time was very restricted. I put an ad up at the School of Visual Arts and found someone who helped me get the show finished. My present assistant has been with me about a year, but I can't always keep him employed unless I've got a big project going, since my work is so hands-on. He helps me prepare the wood, laminate it, and do all the crosscuts necessary before I start carving. In the next few days I'll have to work really hard to get things to the point where there will be something for him to do. While we come from very different backgrounds, we have a lot of the same interests and like the same music; that's important when you are working with someone. If I really thought about it, I'd prefer to hire a woman of color to help me, but I've instead tended to hire the people who happened to come my way asking for a job.

Fred Wilson

Born 1954, Bronx. Studied at SUNY College, Purchase, N.Y., BFA 1976. Currently lives in New York. Most recent solo exhibition at Metro Pictures, New York, October 1992. Forthcoming exhibition at Seattle Art Museum, 1993.

I supported myself in the late '70s and early '80s by working in the education departments of the Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum and the American Crafts Museum in New York. Working in all those museums around the same time, I noticed that the way the museums choose to install works affects how viewers look at them. Notions of display change drastically from one type of museum to another. In 1985 I was hired as a curator at the Longwood Gallery, which is funded by the Bronx Council on the Arts, and I then realized that I could act on some of the things I had observed.

As a curator I wanted to expose artists to a wider public, allow them to see their work in an unfamiliar environment and try things they hadn't tried. Working at the gallery allowed me to play out a lot of my fantasies. One of the exhibitions I curated was called "Rooms with a View." I told the artists in advance that I would be experimenting with their work. I created three different exhibition spaces, one designed to look like an ethnographic museum, one like a turn-of-the-century salon, and the third like the white cube typical of contemporary art galleries. The works installed in the ethnographic room did not have the artists' names and no longer looked like contemporary art; those in the salon appeared to have the authority one associates with wealth; in the modernist space the works appeared cool, calculated. Although the show was well received, I decided I couldn't consistently put artists in such ambiguous contexts. I figured I'd best continue this exploration myself. That was the beginning of my current work.

I hired my first assistant two years ago; I found him through other artists I knew. Often I need to do a lot of things in a short time. Assistants have helped me fabricate certain works, shoot photographs I need, deal with administrative chores and act as gofers. When I'm working out of town my New York assistant, who knows my itinerary, keeps track of my calls and responds to requests for material. Because my assistants have always been part-time I've usually ended up helping them find other part-time jobs, which then became full-time so they quit working for me. Although I'm happy for them, it means I have to start over training a new person. I try to help younger Afro-American artists and students in ways that suit both me and them.

If I'm doing an installation outside New York I always want to meet local people before I start working, so I lecture around the city in question and say I am looking for a short-term assistant. Various candidates come forward, and I pick someone who knows the town. I am with my assistants constantly, all the more so since I don't drive and my work requires that I get a strong sense of the place. If I brought an assistant along with me from New York, I would be in a bit of a cocoon; relying on a local person allows me to be open. I bounce a lot of possibilities around with the assistant; I want to be sure that my ideas make sense to the people who are going to see the work. I don't want to be perceived as this New Yorker coming in and telling them what's what.

In all my exhibitions I use nontraditional media. So for my current Baltimore installation, besides the assistant who functioned somewhat as my double, I had two video assistants, a sound assistant and a slide projectionist. For one tape I told the video people precisely what I wanted. For the second, which served as an educational introduction to the show, I told them the feeling I wanted, rather than lay it out, image by image, and they just took off from there and made the video.

My assistants' wages outside New York are included in the budget I negotiate with the sponsoring organization. Having worked as a curator, I'm comfortable negotiating with museums for the things I need. And they are comfortable with me because they know I'm experienced with art-handling and can work within the institutional structure. I can speak their language. For my upcoming project at the Seattle Art Museum, my assistant is someone who has worked at the museum and has clearance to rummage through the storage vaults with me.

It is really important to me to use local people, because many museums and galleries are not that involved with their local artists. That kind of shortsightedness rubs me the wrong way. When I go to a city, I want to create some activity between the institution I'm working with and its art community, some kind of interaction that wasn't there before—one I hope continues after I leave.

David McDermott & Peter McGough

McDermott: Born 1952, Hollywood, Calif. Studied at Syracuse University, 1970–74. McGough: Born 1958, Syracuse, N.Y. Studied at Syracuse University, 1976; Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 1977. Both artists currently live in New York. Most recent tandem exhibition at Galerie Rizzo, Paris, 1992.

Peter: *Our first assistant was someone David knew from before. We first hired him to marblelize our house.*

David: Because he could do wood-graining we started to put wood elements into our paintings, some of which began to be constructed around his talents. He painted like a 12-year-old.

He painted like a 16-year-old. Anything that had to do with the military he would get correct, since he was a military enthusiast. He moved upstate with us. He did a good job on all the stretchers. He worked for us for three years.

Then we had an assistant named James, who at first stretched canvases but then became our photography assistant. James found us our assistant Allan, who is now working on his own out in Los Angeles.

We asked Allan to paint some wings for us on a painting. He did a good job, and we liked him; he was very sweet and wholesome and nice. And so he helped us paint.

He was a good painter.

His portfolio resembled heavy-metal rock-and-roll album covers. But I could show him a picture and he could copy it. So I would say, "Here do this; here's a picture, do that." He would paint sections of paintings.

We needed to have assistants because of the demand for our work, and because it takes us so long to do it.

We wanted people who could do things that we told them to do. Copy things or paint a

color or stretch a canvas or work out an idea that we had. We often would either paint over what they did or add to it. At first I thought they were better painters than I, but then I would find out that they hadn't gotten it right, and I would have to redo it.

Then this other assistant came in who was Allan's friend. He was really handsome, but he was such a bad painter.

Such a ditz.

So we had to fire him. So then we got this classical painter named Derek, who was a friend of the governess of the Schnabels and had worked for George Condo for two years. He was very conservative. We were sort of nervous around him because he was a really straight person. He was English and smoked cigarettes and was a very heavy person.

He didn't give us an attitude like a lot of them did. He just did it excellently. Anything you asked him to do, he could do.

We took a picture of a goldfish bowl and showed it to him, and he painted it.

Suddenly our dreams of being able to copy photographs were coming true. We could say, "We need bones here, we need this over there," and he could do it. In 1989, when we moved our studio over to Williamsburgh, Brooklyn, only Derek came with us.

Then we hired someone who was terrible. I painted a whole painting and asked him to sand it lightly so the undercolors would come through, and he practically sandblasted the painting. It was a disaster; I had to start the whole painting over again after having worked on it myself for months.

This interest in our work from Bruno Bischofberger kept increasing.

Bruno was very good, because we could be painting a painting, and he would come in and say, even though it wasn't finished, "I want that painting. I know it's not finished, but I know you'll make it a great painting." He would let us work on it and work on it; two years might go by. He bought all of our best paintings from a three-year period when we didn't show in New York, and so no one ever saw those paintings. We are now working on a catalogue for a show of them.

We tried to hire some people from the New York Academy of Art to help us. But they were so temperamental, they were out of their minds. They would come in and work for a day or a week and then quit. We were willing to pay them cash to get the paint on the canvases, but they'd still quit.

Derek found us Lynn, who was a very good copyist. She would copy things—a Caravaggio painting, for example—and then we would stick it in our painting.

We were working with the fact that they were great copyists. So we incorporated that into the art. With Derek, you could give him an idea or show him what you wanted, and he could paint it. Then we hired a French boy.

Sometimes I would have to go up and wipe out everything he had painted.

Because it looked like a hippy had done it.

He would be furious. But we had an idea of what we wanted, and he didn't.

But we found out he could copy.

We had him copy our old paintings.

We did one called *Splendid Achievements* because we thought we had painted all these great paintings already, many of which Bruno had bought. So we did these paintings that incorporated little versions of our works.

They were beautiful paintings.

We had a cross-shaped stretcher left over: we had planned to paint Jesus, but the man made the stretcher wrong, so it was a weird-looking cross. So we hung it sideways instead, and put all these little squares in it and had the different assistants paint their favorite paintings.

No, I picked the paintings.

Our assistants worked really well on that stuff. Some friends sent us this Spanish fellow who needed a job, so we hired him. He was very tall; he didn't speak any English; he was supposed to be from an aristocratic family. I swear he must have worked for six or seven months on this single painting. I didn't want to insult him for how he painted.

I kept trying to fire him, but David wouldn't let me. I kept saying, "I hate what's he's doing," and David kept saying, "Maybe it will turn out."

Then we had this other kid who came up to us on the street, and we hired him. But he didn't know how to paint, so we put him on this painting, and every day he would paint little tiny leaves, little ferns on this jungle painting, and months went by. We had 14 people here.

They weren't all painters. There was a secretary, an accountant, etc.

There were some who worked on our magazine, *The Cottage*. We had a caterer.

At times we had six people working on the paintings in the studio.

It could get to the point where we ourselves wouldn't paint for a couple of days.

Having assistants allowed us to do a lot more work. And we worked really hard. I always did the lettering since no one could do it as well as I could.

I would do the landscapes in our paintings. I would work on that completely, because it was a formula. There are some paintings we never touched.

I wished assistants would paint entire paintings, but they never did.

They painted the flowers and butterflies.

And I painted over them and highlighted them. Yes, we had our assistants work on our paintings, but we were in the paintings all the time. I did a lot of painting. With our assistants we had to deal with all those personalities. One would start crying.

The girl would cry.

And they were lazy. When we would go away for a show only Derek would work.

We paid them really high.

Really high wages.

We paid $5,000 a week in salaries.

We supported these people as artists so they didn't have to be a cook or a waiter or work in a shoe shop. They had jobs doing what they wanted to do. Even when the market got very slow we tried to keep them on. We treated them like kings and queens.

Every day a catered lunch came.

A big huge vegetarian lunch.

That kept them really liking to come here. It was like a clubhouse.

Until they turned against the club leaders. We fired them because of insubordination, because of an uprising against us, because one person in the group started this rumor and they all started becoming really nasty to us and they really had an attitude.

Most of the money we were making from our paintings at that time was going to pay assistants' salaries. So when the art crash hit and we just dismissed everybody, we didn't suffer too much.

We still have an assistant to help us with the photographs. We found a new one who is very capable with antiques.

We have a darkroom upstairs, and the assistant does the developing. Derek still comes in when we need him.

We are painting small pictures now. We are copying our old paintings in watercolor for an upcoming catalogue.

For now, we can work on our paintings ourselves, and see how it goes. If we need help we can ask Derek for it. If we started with assistants again we would work with them in a different way. I wouldn't let it get out of hand. If I didn't have work for them, I'd tell them, "Go."

We only want people who are really competent, so when you pay them you get really good work. Or we want devotion.

Allan McCollum

Born 1944, Los Angeles. Currently lives in New York. Most recent exhibition at Galería Weber, Alexander y Cobo, Madrid, fall 1992. Forthcoming solo exhibition at Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, 1993.

For the first half of my adult life, I worked in unskilled jobs for near-minimum wages, as I never continued my education beyond high school. When I moved from Los Angeles to New York in 1975, I worked for many years in art-world related jobs, usually art-handling and crating, and I developed some of these skills by working in local museums and galleries, eventually on a fairly steady free-lance basis. From my late teens to my early 40s, I learned the difference between jobs that ate away at my self-esteem and those that added to it.

As an artist, my projects had always been oriented towards the philosophy of mass pro-

***"I took an outside job to pay assistants in my studio a higher wage than I was making myself. I thought this was a kind of lunacy."*—Allan McCollum**

"Working as an assistant, I learned about the art world; any romance I had had about it was totally destroyed."—Annette Lemieux

duction, and I had always produced my works somehow *as if* they had been made by other people, but of course I did everything myself because I didn't have the money to pay for an assistant. For the first dozen or so years of my career, my work seemed almost to be about my own obsessional need to produce objects in large quantities. But at a certain point, mainly for philosophical reasons, I concluded that my personal output wasn't enough; I wanted my work to reflect labor beyond my own so that it would express itself as having been made by a group of people.

I developed a desire to design a series of projects that could be worked on communally, in a sociable setting, instead of being produced by one lonely artist. And I wanted the people who looked at my work to recognize this, to say to themselves, "It must have taken a lot of people to do this."

This change in studio methods became possible in the middle '80s because I was being offered more exhibitions, and the demand for my work was multiplying somewhat. I needed the help of others, even though I had very little money to pay them. During this transitional period, several times I found myself working an outside job on my own to pay assistants in my studio a higher wage than I was making myself. I remember thinking this was a kind of lunacy.

As I continued to develop my ideas about mass production as a serious form of expression, and began to use the actual techniques of mass-production in my studio instead of merely referring to them, I had to learn what people do when they run small factories and workshops. Beyond theory, philosophy and esthetics, I also had to address some legal and ethical issues, to learn about occupational safety and health, unemployment and disability insurance, social security taxes and so on—like any other small businessman. I read all the New York labor laws, and I was impressed with how the statutes are designed to protect working people. It's easier to be a good employer if you pay attention to these regulations; they address issues I might not have considered on my own.

Because my art work is so labor intensive, I generally have many assistants, and a large percentage of my income goes to pay for them. I'm aware of having a new motivation for making money, because I have to think in terms of keeping my assistants employed. I've had more than 20 people working for me when there was a really big project, but in terms of steady, full-time people, I've usually had around nine employees. At present I have seven. One of my assistants handles payroll records and bookkeeping; I also have a tax accountant and a payroll service that sends the paychecks out to us every week with my signature already on them. I have two people collecting unemployment currently; everyone is covered by workers' compensation and disability insurance, and their social security and income taxes are withheld in the usual way. It makes me feel safer knowing my assistants have this backup.

I pay my assistants an hourly wage, but they also get a small bonus based on the studio's productivity. Every object we make has a "premium" connected to it: a "Plaster Surrogate" of a certain size has a corresponding dollar amount attached as a premium, a "Perfect Vehicle" has a different premium, a "Drawing" another one again, and so on. At the end of each three months we add up the premiums for everything the studio has produced for that period, and then we divide it up based on each person's percentage of total hours worked. This way, if one person is feeling lazy on a particular day, the others have the incentive to tell him to get moving. The hourly wages are the bulk of what they get, of course; the bonus is more like extra pocket money. Also, my administrative assistant gets a small bonus based on my gross income, and for art collectors my studio manager repairs my work and does conservation on a free-lance basis. As time goes by, I hope I can work out more ways for my assistants to have a financial interest in my work. The more motivated they are to run my studio well, the freer I feel to travel and to pursue new projects.

The responsibilities have become very diffused in my studio, and sometimes you wouldn't realize I was the artist in charge. A lot of the actual labor—making molds, casting, painting, packing, installing—is often done by fabricators and assistants. For better or for worse, I'm often reduced to a kind of manager and production engineer.

I am frequently influenced by my assistants. For instance, my present assistant in charge of painting the "Plaster Surrogates" is much more finicky than I am: it has always been his decision to give something "just one more coat" of paint to make it look even better. As the years have passed, I have come to expect these works to match his standards. It has taken me a while to realize that an assistant, properly motivated, might do the job even better than I would.

Having assistants has changed my personal life in unexpected ways. My need for socializing has altered, because I'm with people in my studio all day long. I learn about their lives and become involved with them in a peripheral way. At first, this became so engrossing that I didn't know how to maintain a personal life of my own. I was hypnotized by the richness of having other people's lives around me. I've also learned attitudes from my assistants that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. Unlike me, a lot of artists come from professional families, and have been to college or art school. And because my studio is generally filled with assistants, I tend to develop my ideas while traveling, when I'm alone in motels.

I've changed the way I think about hiring. I started out hiring an assistant who was a friend of a friend, then I let her hire her friends, and they hired their friends, and so on. I got a lot of people from the same circles, usually from Cooper Union or the Whitney Independent Study Program. Lately, I've learned that it makes sense to run an ad in the paper—I don't list my name—and interview applicants from a wider field. I look for people who really want the job and will enjoy it, people who appreciate the effort I make to give them a regular eight-hour day of work when there might not be any work to do. I tend to resent those who approach the job solely as a way of making contacts.

My assistants tell me that working for me has influenced their work, but it's usually in ways that you wouldn't guess. People often tell me that they are influenced by my painting style, for instance; and I notice that they all are influenced by the way I run my studio operation, because they don't learn this in school. They don't learn about packing and shipping, or how galleries and museums function. I've never had an assistant who seemed greatly influenced by the philosophy of my work. I do like to know what my assistants' life goals are; I had an assistant for three years who hoped to run an art gallery some day, and so I enjoyed steering her toward those tasks that would help her learn how this area of the art world functions.

The idea of having my own little factory obviously appeals to me, although my studio has never functioned like a real factory, where every object is a replica of every other object, all exactly alike. It's usually central to my production routine, in fact, that each object is completely unique. For the show of the "Lost Objects" [see *A.i.A.*, June '92], for instance, I had 15 different molds for the dinosaur bones, and 50 different colors of paint; we were able to make 750 different works without repeating. My "Plaster Surrogates" are done according to a similar system. My "Drawings" and my "Individual Works" require very elaborate organization to maintain the individuality of each piece; I've made over 38,000 of these two kinds of objects, each completely unique, which are displayed and sold in very large collections. My studio manager is in charge of maintaining these systems, which we call "cycling." She keeps track to make sure nothing is ever duplicated, and it's the most important job in my studio.

However, to really appreciate my work I think it's important to understand that I design my projects with a certain type of social behavior in mind. My assistants often work sitting around a table, listening to music and talking to each other as they paint the objects. This communal process is an important part of the narrative I want my work to convey, and it is this conviviality that I most enjoy in running my studio. □

Assistants at work on Allan McCollum's Lost Objects, *1991. Photo Fred Scruton. Courtesy John Weber Gallery.*