

RECONSIDERING THE OBJECT OF ART: ANN GOLDSTEIN AND ANNE RORIMER 1965-1975

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In 1966-67, while he was studying at the University of California, Davis, Stephen J. Kaltenbach proposed a number of Room Constructions, one of which was exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1969. In the interest of paring down the elements of his work in Minimalist fashion—short of allowing the work to disappear—he built simple, enterable shapes. As he has remarked, the Room Constructions are “not living rooms...designed for human comfort,” but specifically presented obstacles to those who entered them.¹ Significantly, Kaltenbach covered each confrontational shape with “a traditional interior finishing material so that it would become part of the room.”² Early on, therefore, he sought to counter expectations about the formal qualities of an object and its function as a work of art.

In ensuing works from 1967 to 1970, when he was based in New York, Kaltenbach further attempted to deter viewers from worn-out paths of thinking. In these pieces, he sought to lend greater validity to works of art as social stimuli as opposed to objects of material value. Pieces such as the Time Capsules, Sidewalk Plaques, *Artforum* Ads, Graffiti, and *SLANT STEP* suggest the nature of Kaltenbach's aesthetic concerns and the great variety of his activity.

The Time Capsules (1967-69) were given by the artist to individuals in the art world, such as Barbara Rose and Bruce Nauman, and to institutions such as The Museum of Modern Art in New York. They are sealed until the date specified on the outside of the capsule, at which point the material inside (whether information and/or things) becomes known. The Capsules defy the traditional “handling” of art insofar as they are not meant to be commercially viable. Moreover, they invert the idea that art is “timeless.” Once the work's literal contents are revealed, its thematic content (the act of concealment) is negated.

The bronze Sidewalk Plaques were conceived for placement in city pavements. They enabled Kaltenbach to remain anonymous and, tangentially, to make an object that was not a conventional commodity. Each plaque bears a different word in raised relief: “blood,” “fire,” “air,” “bone,” and “water.” By positioning these single word elements in the street, Kaltenbach integrated his work with the quotidian reality of the city. The Sidewalk Plaques provided a new option for sculpture in that they were not designed to be shown on a pedestal within a museum or gallery



situation. Concluding, however, that they ultimately only “brought the museum out into the street and [that] they identified what was going on as an art work,” Kaltenbach subsequently sought other methods for discarding conventions that determine the recognizability of art as such.³

His *KISS* (*GRAFFITI STAMP: LIPS OF THE ARTIST*) (1968) relates both to advertising and to the anonymity of the artist. Kaltenbach carried onto the New York subway a rubber stamp with an image he designed of lips. He stamped the image onto a ubiquitous poster for Fruit of the Loom stockings, placing it beside the brand name and on the thigh of the model pictured. In this way, he made his own mark without revealing that the image was his or, for that matter, any artist's.

The advertisements Kaltenbach placed in *Artforum* in 1968 and 1969 present another alternative to the installation of three-dimensional objects inside or outside the museum. The first advertisement, consisting of the phrase “Art Works,” appeared in *Artforum* in November 1968. The second, which was published in the December issue, is a lozenge shape based upon the “blp,” an oval shape that the artist Richard Artschwager constructed or spray-painted in various sites throughout the late 1960s—including museums and galleries, as well as the street—as a kind of graffiti. Engigmatically inscribed with the name “Johnny Appleseed,” this advertisement reflects Kaltenbach's interest in transforming the meaning of another artist's work through appropriation, recontextualization, and the addition of new information to it. The third advertisement, published in January 1969, is a photograph of a sculpture of the word “ART” wrapped as a package and repeatedly labelled “ART”; the fact that the work is wrapped conceals the identity of the work and of the word. Finally, the other

³“ART WORKS” (1968)
From Sidewalk Plaque series. Cast bronze plaque to be set in concrete. 5 x 8 1/8 x 5/8 in. (12.7 x 20.6 x 1.6 cm). Collection the artist.



advertisements are succinct and sometimes suggestive statements such as "You Are Me" that offered a forum for a provocative incursion into the weightiness of critical dogma found in art magazines and for further challenging accepted "high" art notions as well.⁴

Kaltenbach's work *EXPOSE YOUR SELF* was first realized for the exhibition "Between Man and Matter: Tokyo Biennale '70," presented at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Gallery in May 1970. The piece consisted of the three words "Expose Your Self" stenciled onto the four walls of a room in seven different languages in a sequence chosen by the museum. Kaltenbach recreated the piece for "Information," presented at The Museum of Modern Art in the summer of 1970. He had intended to have the phrase stenciled in the same manner in public restrooms throughout the city of New York before the opening of the exhibition. However, the phrase was ultimately only stenciled in a restroom in the museum. Inside the museum, the work questioned assumptions about the nature of an artwork by slyly urging viewers to open their minds to what might appear as artless art. Outside the institutional context, it functioned purely as graffiti, as opposed to a work by an artist's hand. — AR

Notes

1. Stephen J. Kaltenbach, in Cindy Nemser, "An Interview with Stephen Kaltenbach," *Artforum* 9, no. 3 (November 1970): 48.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 52.

4. They are: "Tell a lie," 7, no. 6 (February 1969): 71; "Start a rumor," 7, no. 7 (March 1969): 96; "Perpetrate a hoax," 7, no. 8 (April 1969): 80; "Build a reputation," 7, no. 9 (May 1969): 73; "Become a legend," 7, no. 10 (Summer 1969): 11; "Teach Art," 8, no. 1 (September 1969): 69; "Smoke," 8, no. 2 (October 1969): 79; "Trip," 8, no. 3 (November 1969): 85; "You are me," 8, no. 4 (December 1969): 75.

"FLESH" (1968)

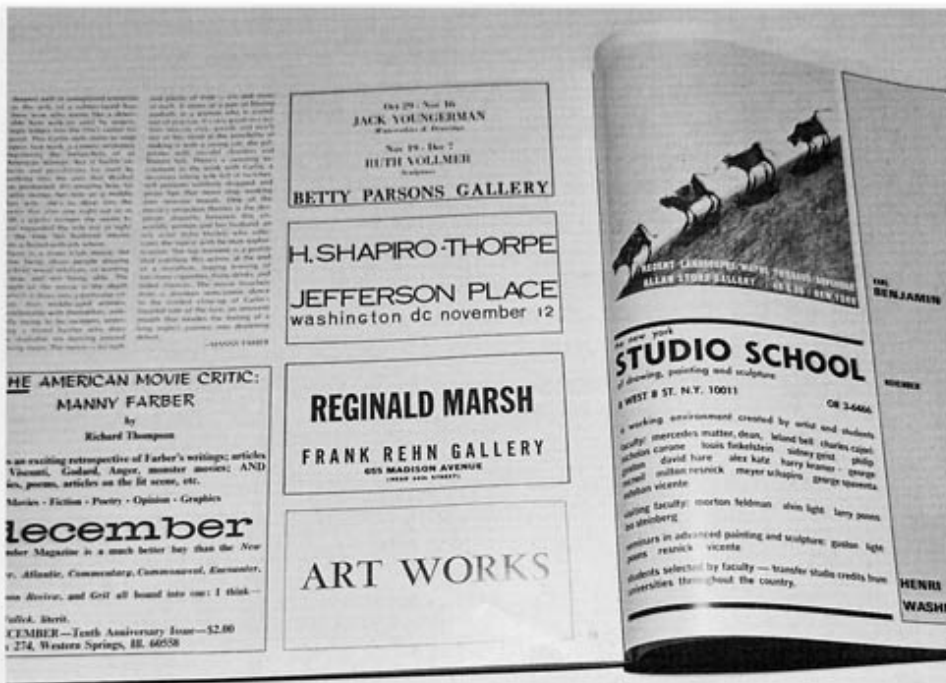
From Sidewalk Plaque series. Cast bronze plaque to be set in concrete. 4 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in. (10.2 x 26.7 x 0.6 cm). Courtesy the artist and John Natsoulas Gallery, Davis, California.

"BONE" (1968)

From Sidewalk Plaque series. Cast bronze plaque to be set in concrete. 4 x 9 x 1/4 in. (10.2 x 22.9 x 0.6 cm). Courtesy the artist and John Natsoulas Gallery, Davis, California.

Time capsule for Bruce Nauman (1968)
Stainless steel cylinder. Collection Bruce Nauman.





"ART WORKS" (1968)
 From the Artforum Ads series. Offset on paper. Page size, 10 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (26.7 x 26.7 cm); image size, 2 1/4 x 4 3/8 in. (5.7 x 11.1 cm).
 Published in Artforum 7, no. 3 (November 1968):72.