

GORDON MATTA-CLARK, John Gibson Gallery; "SLIDE SHOW," JUDY PFAFF, Artists Space; JOSEPH BEUYS, GEORGE BRECHT, GEOFREY HENDRICKS, RAY JOHNSON, René Block Gallery;

Although I arrived late, I saw most of the special slide show of galleryless New York artists put on by Artists Space. The audience of about 150 artists, dealers, critics, and curators all sat slackjawed as the slides flicked by. We saw 440 slides in an hour, two per artist in the time it took to say each's name. No one in the crowd that I saw took notes, and no one asked that the presentation be held up for a closer examination of particular slides.

Lots of interesting stuff flashed by, and a lot of academic hackwork. But then the slides were presented in such a depressing rapid-fire there was no real chance that the work would be seen. All the subtle painting was lost. For all I know, work by Brice Marden or Jules Olitski could have whipped by without notice, but then that stuff takes time to see. The presentation was a rough reminder of just how many artists there are around here, and there are surely many more than the 220 with slides in the Artists Space file.

If there had been a chance for the audience members to interrupt, or have slides held out for later inspection, the commitment they'd made to come in the first place might logically have extended the evening into an all-nighter. As it was, the presentation was simply pro forma and a waste of time.

Perhaps some of those who attended will come back to browse through the four-drawer file at leisure (I know I will). But even then it's not adequate. Slides can never stand for work, and going through the file can never substitute for visiting artists' studios.

After this numbing display, I stumbled toward light (moving past some laminated wooden animals on the floor, and some rural Realist paintings on the walls), into the gallery's back room. Three walls there had been made over into an environment by JUDY PFAFF, a veritable encyclopedia of au courant abstract sculptural and pictorial incident. "Modernist madness!" I cried, the slide show fresh in my mind. But it's okay. There are no surprises in her vocabulary of forms, nor in the materials she uses — light bulbs, wire, chunks of wood, canvas, paper — but it's a gutsy synthesis, and it throws some problems into relief.

The current renaissance of De Stijl and Russian avant-garde forms ("revisionist Constructivism," Joseph Masheck called it) in painting and sculpture abjures the strident attitudes and moral fervor that marked those earlier movements. Ours is more an abstraction of uncertainty, and the forms on Pfaff's walls are tentative to the point of pathos. She hasn't the confidence to round out a circle or sharpen a rectangle; she doesn't declare form, she intimates it. This is not

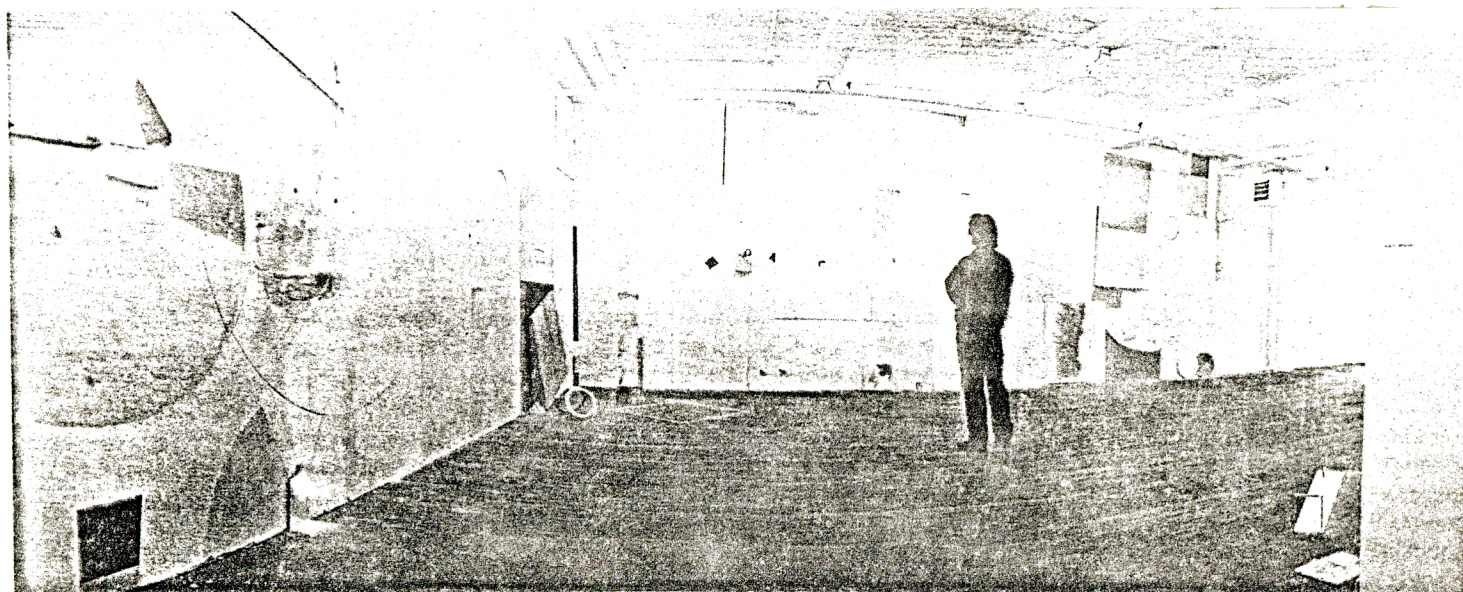
a shortcoming, it is a choice to substitute nuance and wit for the bold visual statement. The sculptural elements in Pfaff's environment — which are by nature declarative forms — are all quite small, as are her cuts into the wall. These same miniature elements contain all the strong colors. On the walls, she ventures only pastels and pencil marks.

Many abstract artists have taken on the wall itself. It is inevitable that they should do so, just as painting and sculpture inevitably leave their marks on the architecture of their time. Recently, this engagement has been undertaken in assertively systemic terms, indicating, I think, a latent impulse toward architecture. Pfaff's wall, however, is not systemic but episodic. Her markings seem ill at ease without a canvas to bound them. Pfaff freely records her hesitancy — which is not the same as naiveté — as if to imply that the work should not have been made. Her environment seems overly bold. It belies a venturesomeness that is compelling because it is so fragile.

René Block Gallery, newly opened here from Germany, mounted "What's the Time?" — an exhibition of multiples and original work by 17 American and European Fluxus artists — as "a preview of the coming season." Fluxus is a moniker advanced by George Maciunas in 1962 from the Latin root of fluid and flux. The movement's activities here and abroad were intended to be transient, and the artists who participated in them during the '60s are today quite resistant to those who would corral and context them. Sixty years after, Dada has succeeded in evading historians determined to chronicle and interpret that movement, and Fluxus will doubtless prove a similar bummer. A friend of mine

said, "Fluxus is the most successful fucked up art movement," since it denied itself a critical base as it emerged. Right.

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Judy Pfaff, Installation view, 1974.