

Art Goes Underground

By April Kingsley

In the old days artists in a group show fought to maximize or at least maintain the integrity of the boundaries of their allotted space. I recall the problems we had trying to keep Dan Flavin's colored light out of Michael Asher's pure white room in the *Spaces* exhibition at MOMA a few years ago. Thus, I am continually amazed at the willingness with which young artists interweave their works with one another's, produce collaboratively, or simply remain anonymous—as happens in the current show at Artists Space, 105 Hudson Street (to October 28), of ADRIAN PIPER, CINDY SHERMAN, and LOUISE LAWLER. What's more, many of these young artists seem to have no qualms about freely appropriating the ideas of others. The shades of Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris, Rafael Ferrer, Michael Asher, and, of course, Marcel Duchamp, haunt the show, and one of the artists seems embarrassingly derivative of the early work of another.

Adrian Piper dominates the exhibition because she has managed to pull together the erotic, political, socioeconomic, and aesthetic themes that have long engaged her into a single compelling work—one large b&w photograph of angry-looking black workingmen, eyes staring straight at you, descending a staircase. Your position locates you at its base, while a taped monologue, "Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma," questions you about your reactions to the photograph and challenges your perception of its content. The work as a whole literalizes the old saw that a work of art questions reality, poses problems, and challenges previous art. It also ironically plays with the notion that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, since all the eyes in the piece stare at you, and, in this way, it exemplifies Duchamp's statement that "The artist is only one aspect of the creative process. The spectator—by his active response—completes the cycle." Piper's words, mercifully spoken out instead of being intoned as is all too common these days in this kind of "alternate space art," stir up the voyeuristic implications of viewing art, and the sexual charge it may provide, when she asks, "What's the point of their seeming to stare at you?" and "Why do you always seem to end up staring at your own reflection in the glass? At the expression on your face, in your eyes, around your mouth?" Piper's provocative work used to center on self-definition

through various disguises and anonymous "performances" in public places, such as dumping garbage all over her clothes and riding the subway despoiled. She has expanded her horizons to examine the meaning of art itself, now that we are familiar enough with her to know how she must see herself when confronted with the imagery we now face.