

ARTFORUM

J.B. Cobb, Martha Edelheit, Ree Morton, McArthur Binion, Jonathan Borofsky, Mary Obering Artists Space

Artists Space, organized by the Committee on the Visual Arts and funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, is a new alternative to the commercial gallery situation which opened in SoHo this fall. Three artists per month exhibit in its large, divided space, the third floor of 155 Wooster Street. The process by which these artists are selected is the distinguishing characteristic. The Committee invites individual, known artists to each select one artist to exhibit. The only stipulation is that the selected artist cannot have any gallery affiliation, which means that the space functions for artists who have had little or no exposure. The announcements make clear who has chosen whom, and thus the process of selection remains visible and accountable, on a one-to-one basis. It is healthy that artists, who often indirectly aid the careers of other artists through their associations with dealers and curators, are directly and individually responsible. The fear expressed by some artists, both the choosers and the chosen, that their names might be irrevocably linked with one another, has proven unfounded. The very visibility of the selection process reduces the importance attached to any individual selection and as more and more artists choose and are chosen, the importance continues to diminish. Even after two months it has become just another way for artists to have their work seen by the public.

In September J.B. Cobb, Martha Edelheit, and Ree Morton exhibited, selected by Richard Nonas, Lucas Samaras, and Nancy Graves respectively. Ree Morton's work consists of pieces of wood and sometimes stone which support each other in various arrangements. I like the way Morton integrates drawing into her sculpture, with actual drawings on paper, lines drawn on wood, or simply by having the elements function spatially and also as marks. However, I have seen other work, larger in scale and simpler in arrangement, which avoids preciousness more successfully than the work shown here. Martha Edelheit's large paintings of nudes in urban and pastoral landscapes are stiff and uninteresting. Four smaller paintings, each depicting a view of New York on and through the back of a single nude, in a kind of continuous, transparent tattoo, were somewhat better if only because of their humor. As with much figurative art, the most discernible qualities of Edelheit's work are its ambition and its obsolescence. J.B. Cobb exhibited four pieces, two using projected slides, one using video, and one film. While the work suggested Michael Snow and Peter Campus, it also indicated potential. In *Set Timer*, the best piece, two film loops projected the image of a walking torso on two screens facing each other. Each figure walked forward to a certain point, turned and walked away, turned again and walked forward. The distance walked equaled the distance between the two screens; there was an implied crossing and recrossing of the space between them.

In October, McArthur Binion, Jonathan Borofsky, and Mary Obering were selected by Ronald Bladen, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre respectively. Obering's paintings consist of squares and rectangles of painted canvas attached to painted canvas. This physical construction is countered by a perspectival illusion which the placement of the pieces creates. Obering's muted color is reminiscent of Marden's, and the work vaguely suggests a semiabstract Classical landscape. Binion works with crayola on unstretched canvas which has pieces of string glued to its back in various arrangements. The result is a pale, all-over surface broken by loose embossed lines. In smaller, more recent pieces, Binion builds up a predominantly white, continuous surface of wax and crayola on

aluminum, which makes the surface more distinct and physical, suggesting Kusama and Resnick. Both Binion and Obering are involved with a current kind of painting, one which involves visibility of process or construction, but which achieves a familiar result, as beautiful as it is undeveloped. Borofsky exhibited a stack of paper about two feet high on which, over the past four years, he has counted to over two million. The numbers are written in all kinds of ink and script on all kinds of paper (primarily letter-size sheets, so the stack is a regular column). I liked the obsessiveness of the process, the solidness of the column and the impossibility of reading all the numbers or seeing that process.

It will be interesting to see how Artists Space proceeds. Thus far the work has been average and, perhaps, rather young. Still, if one artist doing promising work exhibits each month, it will be a very decent record. I like the continual rotation of artists choosing other artists, the resulting neutrality of the space, and the diversity of the work seen so far. It is important that artists support each other and that new work be presented casually but professionally, without the pressures of a commercial gallery situation. It opens things up for everyone. This particular selection process seems to be as fallible as any other even though it is more visible and direct. This should reduce the anxieties of various nonartists responsible for similar choices and increase the understanding of those artists who disagree with them.