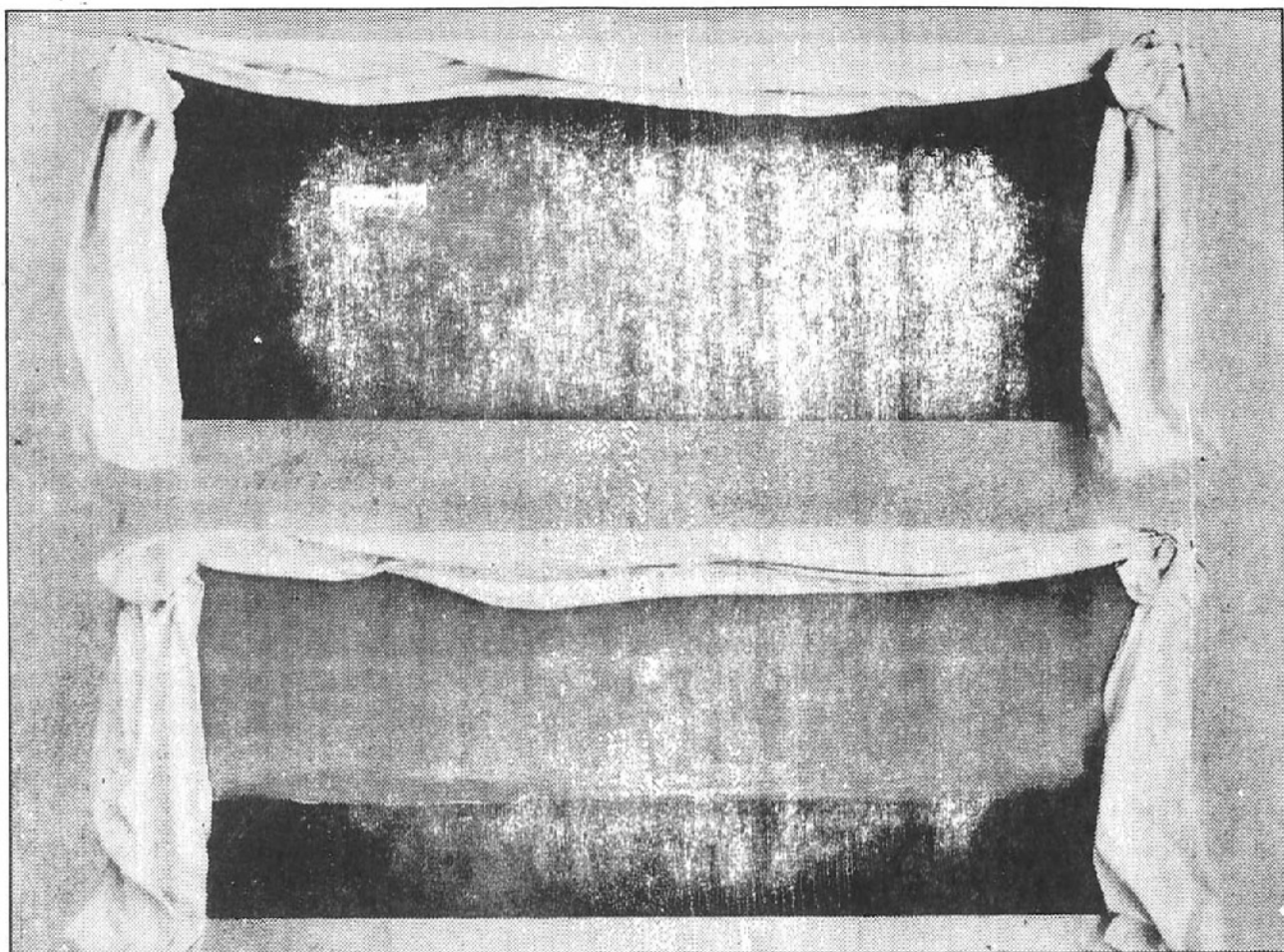


GALLERY VIEW

JOHN RUSSELL

A Birthday at Artists Space



Ree Morton's "Regional Work No. 7" at the Artists Space sixth anniversary show

The alternative space or unstandardized arena is very much with us, all over the world. In London or Paris it is taken for granted that some of the best theater may be going on in a locomotive shed or a skating rink. If we want to see modern dance in New York, we have learned to look for it everywhere but in a conventional theater. People are used to hearing chamber music in churches, and when some first-desk men from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra were here a year or so they played way downtown in a space called The Kitchen that is not at all like their own great hall back at home. Some of the most rewarding exhibitions of the last few years have been

in P.S. 1, a rehabilitated old school building just across the East River, or at the top of an office building called The Clocktower at 108 Leonard Street.

All this peppers the stew of metropolitan life, but it is not at all new. Already in 1855 Gustave Courbet was showing his paintings in an alternative space in Paris because he couldn't get an official one. Two decades later, the first-ever French Impressionist exhibition was held in a photographer's studio. For years, Cézanne's paintings could be seen in alternative spaces or not at all. D.H. Kahnweiler's gallery showed the early masterpieces of Picasso and Braque in a space that was distinctly alternative in the eyes of people

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who expected velvet on the walls, potted palms in the lobby and a uniformed doorman to keep the mob at bay. Where was the Armory Show held in 1913, if not in one of the more ample of New York's alternative spaces? What we have seen in the 1970's is the institutionalization of the alternative space and its acceptance as fundamental to art life, both here and in Europe.

Alternative spaces don't always last, but after six years the one called Artists Space at 105 Hudson Street, southwest of SoHo, is in very good shape. Its birthday has been marked by a big show (now dismantled) at the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York, and a small but extensive show at its headquarters in Manhattan. The same ten artists were in both exhibitions, and they had it in common that they were given shows very early on at Artists Space and were recommended to it by other, better established artists. Artists Space is run by the Committee for Visual Arts, Inc., a non-profit organization which was founded in 1972 to help artists to make contact with their audience. The committee gets ideas from all over, and has plenty of its own, but one of its firmer convictions is that, other things being equal, artists are the best judges of new art. They know when it's good, and they also know when it is ripe for exhibition.

It is clear from the anniversary show at 105 Hudson Street that some artists chose work that relates to their own, while others chose work that took quite another direction. Just for the record, of the ten artists now on view, Laurie Anderson was originally chosen by Vito Acconci, Jon Borofsky was chosen by Sol LeWitt, Scott Burton was chosen by Claes Oldenburg, Lois Lane was chosen by Jackie Winsor, Ree Morton was chosen by Nancy Graves, Judy Pfaff was chosen by Al Held, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt was chosen by Christo, Barbara Schwartz was chosen by Nancy Grossman, Charles Simonds was chosen by a whole group of artists and John Torreano was chosen by Chuck Close.

As all ten of these artists went on to achieve recognition in one degree or another, time may be said to have vindicated their sponsors. How much in this was owed to kinship and how much to divination is an interesting question. Any one who remembers Claes Oldenburg's outsize "Bedroom" will see an affinity with Scott Burton's not seldom sinister reinventions of furniture. Vito Acconci is one of the most accomplished whisperers in the business, we are not surprised that he caught on to Laurie Anderson, whose telephone-piece at 105 Hudson Street will talk to you very quietly for an hour and a half if you don't hang up. Al Held in many of his own paintings is a master of long, thin, black baton-like forms, and there is an evident affinity between those forms and the brightly colored stick sculptures that Judy Pfaff scattered like exploding fireworks all over the big hall at the Neuberger Museum. In these choices, like calls to like.

But like doesn't call to like — or, if it does, we have trouble. Sol LeWitt chooses Jon Borofsky. Glitter and glass jewelry give much of Mr. Torreano's work a candy store look that has nothing to do with Mr. Close's pertinacious re-processing of visual information. Jon Borofsky operates as a free-running autobiographer, telling his tales on whatever surface is nearest to hand, whereas Mr. LeWitt in his work keeps his reminiscences very much to himself.

Nancy Graves, again, has a long history of involvement with maps and charts and other schematic renderings of the universe, but it seems likely that when she chose the late Ree Morton she simply recognized Miss Morton as a free and poetic spirit who could do with some encouragement. There is a quality of imaginative invention about Ree Morton that came out very strongly at Purchase (especially in mized in two-part paintings that showed the look both of the horizon and of the creatures of the deep) and can also be sensed at 105 Hudson Street.

Artists Space is by no means the only alternative space in New York, but on the evidence of these two shows it is one that functions efficiently and with great good will as an intermediary between new art and the public. It has good rooms; it has a dedicated director in Helene Winer; it isn't too far from anywhere, and it is neither silly nor pretentious. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. Happy Birthday!