

From *Seeing out Louder* published by Hard Press Editions, October, 2009

## THE NEW YORK CANON

by Jerry Saltz

(*New York Magazine*, 4.03.08)

A canon is antithetical to everything the New York art world has been about for the past 40 years, during which time we went from being the center of the art world to being one of many centers. But *New York* magazine is celebrating its 40 year anniversary and asked me to think about what events make up a New York Canon of art. It's possible to look at the artists and events I choose and not see a direct line of growth (if there has ever been such a thing), but rather an expanding and contracting cloud that has broken free of linear progress, something that grows in all directions at once. The fact that there was no one New York Ur-Artist, no single style that dominated all the others in this period is a form of progress in itself. Even though the magazine wanted a New York-oriented list I did *not* just pick art about New York by New Yorkers. I choose work that seemed to change the way that art looked in New York. That's why there are artists from Europe, Asia and elsewhere in America here.

Those who now say that New York is finished because the market is ruining everything need to get a grip. Several times in the past 40 years, New York artists faced oblivion. More bad art may be being made and sold now than ever before but each artist has to deal with what the market means to him or her in the privacy of their own studio. Enough artists are doing that, and are still making great art. They'll still be doing so 40 years from now.

### 1968

At 4:15 pm on Monday, June 3rd, Valerie Solanas, a disgruntled Factory hanger-on and founder of S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men), enters Warhol's studio at 33 Union Square and shoots him with a .32 automatic as he screams, "No! No! Valerie! Don't do it!" As Warhol lies on the floor critically wounded, longtime minion, Billy Name, cradles Warhol's head and begins to cry. Mistaking it for laughter, Warhol says, "Oh, please don't make me laugh, Billy. Please it hurts too much." Then he passes out. Warhol is taken by ambulance to Columbus Hospital, wheeled into an emergency room at 4:45 pm. Six minutes later, at 4:51 pm, he is pronounced "clinically dead." Still, Dr. Giuseppe Rossi continues to try, then succeeds in reviving him. Warhol recuperates in the hospital for several weeks. Afterwards he says, "Before I was shot, I always suspected I was watching TV instead of living life. Right when I was being shot I knew I was watching television. Since I was shot everything is such a dream to me. I don't know whether or not I'm really alive -- whether I died. It's sad." Many say the shooting marks a downturn in Warhol's work. Later, at a party that year, a drunken Willem de Kooning refuses to shake Warhol's hand saying, "You're a killer of art."

Bruce Nauman's solo debut at Leo Castelli initiates the career of one of the most important American post-war artists. Nauman made art about making art and being in the studio. He tried to levitate there, walked in funny patterns, made mazes for rats then had people beat punching bags with bats to drive the rats nuts. He filmed clowns on the toilet and made dazzling neon text pieces that said "Run from Fear" then "Fun from Rear." Somewhere I remember Nauman saying that he was interested in "the not-knowing part" of art. That "not-knowing" has never seemed so bottomless.

The art world begins to codify into a new group of artists who are neither Pop nor Minimal. Two major gallery openings signal the rise of these new artists. The pioneering Bykert Gallery, run by writer-critic Klaus Kertess, debuts and exhibits a new generation including Chuck Close, Brice Marden, Dorteia Rockburne, Barry Le Va, Peter Campus and Joe Zucker -- artists who will open Minimalism up and take it to wilder and more complicated shores. That same year Paula Cooper launches the first gallery in SoHo with an exhibition to benefit the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, including works by Carl Andre, Robert Mangold, Robert Ryman, as well as Sol Le Witt's first wall drawing. Cooper goes on to champion the work of a generation of notables including Jonathan Borofsky, Jennifer Bartlett, Elizabeth Murray, Joel Shapiro and Alan Shields.

### **1969**

Vito Acconci merges conceptual art, performance, psychology, paranoia and sexuality in *Following Piece*. Acconci followed selected strangers around the street until they went into a private place. Pieces lasted from a few minutes to several hours. The following year, when Leo Catelli, Ileana Sonnabend, John Weber and others opened galleries in an industrial building in SoHo at 420 West Broadway -- thus heralding the arrival of the SoHo gallery scene -- at Sonnabend, Acconci created *Seedbed*, in which he lay hidden under the ramped floor of the gallery masturbating for two weeks while recounting sexual fantasies via speakers to viewers above him. Later, when asked by Richard Prince if he thought that his gravelly voice helped him with women, Acconci replied that his voice was one that "lulls you through a dark disturbed night. . . promising intimacy, sincerity, integrity, maybe some deep, dark secret." Acconci is the art world's Johnny Cash / Keith Richards / Quasimodo.

### **1970**

Famed Abstract Expressionist Philip Guston abandons his former abstract-impressionist style and mounts a show at Marlborough Gallery of paintings of oafish figurative paintings, Ku Klux Klansmen, one-eyed brutes and paint brushes. Artists see that Guston is pointing towards new ideas for figuration at a time when strict abstraction ruled the roost. The show is universally panned by critics, including grouchy conservative Hilton Kramer, who in the *New York Times* famously dismissed Guston as "a mandarin pretending to be a stumblebum."

With little money at stake, no sales prospects and few galleries committed to showing the work of emerging artists, 112 Greene Street gallery is founded. This initiates the rise of artist-run spaces. Artist-founder Jeffrey Lew remarks, "None of the doors in 112 were ever locked. It was the most open, if not the only socialist art system in New York at the time." Before it closed in 1978, the gallery exhibited the work of Alice Aycock, Laurie Anderson, Chris Burden, Mary Beth Edelson, Jackie Winsor and many other luminaries.

*Avalanche Magazine* -- the main disseminator of conceptual art -- is founded by Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp. The modest black-and-white magazine features articles on artists like Yvonne Rainer, Keith Sonnier, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, William Wegman, Bruce Nauman, Hans Haacke, Alice Aycock and others, and also looks towards new art in Europe, a relative rarity in the U.S.-centric art scene in New York.

The Guggenheim Museum steps in it twice in one year.

It canceled its Hans Haacke exhibition six weeks before it is set to open because Haacke intended to exhibit a multi-part work delineating the real estate transactions of several of New

York's most notorious slumlords. The director of the Guggenheim, Tom Messer, claimed museums should not exhibit work that has "active engagement toward social and political ends." Next, the museum removed Daniel Buren's 66 x 32 foot stripped banner-painting from the main rotunda after artists (including Dan Flavin and Donald Judd) vehemently protested that Buren's work interfered with theirs. Buren's heart was broken but his name was made.

At the corner of Wooster and Prince Streets in SoHo, the restaurant Food was opened by artists Gordon Matta-Clark, Tina Girouard and others. The place became the school cafeteria of SoHo and an artistic nerve center as the neighborhood slowly turned into a kibbutz and a clubhouse for artists.

### **1972**

With the rise of the feminist art movement, A.I.R. Gallery opened its doors in SoHo. It was the first cooperative gallery for women artists in the United States. The gallery exhibited the work of Dotty Attie, Nancy Spero, Barbara Zucker, Agnes Denis, Harmony Hammond, Howardena Pindell and many others.

### **1973**

Artist, writer, magician-of-the-earth Robert Smithson, 35, was killed in a plane crash inspecting a work in Amarillo, Texas. Smithson, a progenitor of Earth Works, demonstrated that art could be removed from galleries and also that galleries could embody some of the spirit and mood of outdoor works of art.

### **1974**

Feeling "underrepresented in the male-run artistic community," artist Lynda Benglis took out a double page ad in the November issue of *Artforum*, featuring a photo of herself (taken by artist Robert Morris) wearing nothing but a pair of sunglasses, holding a giant dildo to her crotch. Carter Radcliff notes, "The following month, the other associate editors -- Lawrence Alloway, Max Kozloff, Rosalind Krauss, Joseph Masheck, Annette Michelson -- published a letter to the editor-in-chief, John Coplans, to let the art world know how deeply they had been offended by the 'extreme vulgarity' of Benglis's picture." Quick to see the hypocrisy of these reactions, the ever-anti-authoritarian critic Robert Rosenblum wrote a letter saying, "Let's give three dildos and a Pandora's Box to Ms. Benglis, who finally brought out of the closet the Sons and Daughters of the Founding Fathers of the *Artforum* Committee of Public Decency and Ladies Etiquette." Krauss and other *Artforum* editors left the magazine to form the arcane theory journal, *October*.

### **1975**

Gordon Matta-Clark cut large slices and holes out of Pier 52 on Gansevoort Street, creating an enormous civic earthwork and an act of creative destruction. The work was a sort of Declaration of Artistic Independence that signaled to artists that art should be made in the world and not just shown in galleries. He was arrested for his efforts. Matta-Clark died of cancer three years later at the age of 35.

### **1976**

Jennifer Bartlett exhibits her enormous multi-paneled painting *Rhapsody* at the Paula Cooper Gallery. Comprised of over 900 12-inch enamel-painted steel plates hung frieze-style, *Rhapsody* is immediately recognized as a breakthrough of systems art, process art, post-minimalism, feminism and a way back into the then-forbidden territory of painting.

## 1977

Marianne Goodman Gallery opens on 57th Street. She is known for showing top-tier non-Americans such as Marcel Broodthaers, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Jeff Wall, Maurizio Cattelan, Tony Craig, Richard Deacon, Rineke Dykstra, William Kentridge, Gabriel Orozco and Thomas Struth. Without Goodman, it's arguable that America's wake-up call in the early 1980s might have come too late or not at all. She deserves some sort of Artistic Legion of Honor.

As does Marcia Tucker, who quit her job as curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art and founded the New Museum. Within its first five years, the New Museum presented the first retrospectives of artists like Alfred Jensen, Barry Le Va, Ree Morton and John Baldessari. Tucker retired her position in 1999 and died in 2006, at the age of 66.

The "Pictures" exhibition at Artist Space, curated by Douglas Crimp, with artists Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith, signaled a change in artistic atmosphere to a more theoretical, cerebral, critical approach. This cool, collected, theory-based work is antithetical to nascent Neo-Expressionist and Graffiti art of the same moment.

## 1978

Artist Alan Sonfist creates *Time Landscape*, a 40 x 200 foot plot of pre-colonial forest on the corner of La Guardia and Houston using a palette of native trees, shrubs, wild grasses, flowers, plants, rocks and earth. I've always imagined Sonfist would be commissioned by the U.S. government to create a one-mile-wide swath of pre-colonial growth stretching from New York to Los Angeles.

Two life-altering events in one day. First I was floored by Rothko's paintings in his Guggenheim retrospective, which were like glowing Buddhist TVs.

Immediately afterwards, I witnessed the effects of fame when I saw John Lennon and Yoko Ono on Madison Avenue. Dazzled by the sight, I couldn't stop looking, and fell into step behind them. I ended up following in their wake for about 20 blocks, watching the waves of recognition spread down Madison Avenue, the marvelous shock, the astonishment, the joy. It was like an emotional landslide. People staggered or seemed to buckle as the couple passed. Space distorted, time fell into a trance. The light of forever appeared to glow around them. At that exact moment in that exact place they seemed the sum of all sums. I still feel the reverberations on that particular stretch of upper Madison Avenue. That was old-fashioned fame: God-like, classic, aristocratic, transcendental, almost religious, a strange, strange love. The bigger the crowd of idolaters, the more unique you felt in your idolatry. Fame is not like that anymore. Fame is feral, or simply celebrity squared. Debased or replaced by its more ordinary manifestations (the well-known, the groovy, or the merely recognizable), fame now attaches itself to nobodies. Celebrity is an everyday thing, our biggest export. We're a nation of Kennedys. You're famous, maybe, or someone you know is: the chef at the restaurant you go to, your hairdresser, your doctor, architect, interior designer, or florist. You know somebody who knew John Jr., or, as one woman told *News Channel 4*, "I didn't know him, but my dog knew his dog."

## 1979

Five years after his barely-noticed 1974 New York debut in which he lived in the Rene Block Gallery for three days with a live coyote, the Guggenheim Museum retrospective of German

artist Joseph Beuys ends America's isolationist hegemony. Major critics denounce Beuys while artists see that he represents new ways of thinking about materials, myth, history, narrative and object-making. The following two years see the American debuts of German giants like Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Anselm Kiefer. It should have been too late for American artists to recover from their provincial pluralism. But because Americans didn't really know how far behind they were, they fought on and managed to take the stage.

Nan Goldin presents her great slideshow / soap opera / book of the dead / manifesto of the beautiful and the damned, "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency," at the Mudd Club. This work records the lives, loves, costume changes, addictions, distractions and binges of a small group of creative souls sometimes known as "The Family of Nan." Goldin opened the doors to legions of snap-shooters who also wanted to create their own Photography of Modern Life.

Julian Schnabel shows plate paintings at Mary Boone Gallery, makes everyone crazy with his ambition, self-centered pronouncements, high prices, sell-out shows, waiting lists and magazine coverage. The first time oil paint is smelled in New York galleries in years.

## **1980**

Young artists, critics, and curators begin their takeover of the New York art world with the "Times Square Show," curated by artists, and held in a two-floor former bus depot and massage parlor off Times Square. It included work by unknowns Jenny Holzer, David Hammons, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Kiki Smith, Walter Robinson and many others who were making a loose street-wise non-academic, non-post-minimal art. The show is a call to artists everywhere to do what they want as often and as energetically as possible. Next, ABC No Rio incubates, "The Real Estate Show," a similarly all-over-the-place exhibition held in a vacant tenement Lower East Side tenement featuring many new downtown artists. The following year sees "New Wave New York" at P.S.1, curated by Diego Cortez. The show includes Sarah Charlesworth, Larry Clark, Fab 5 Freddy, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Nan Goldin, Kenny Scharf, Kiki Smith, Robin Winters and others. Do it yourself becomes the new credo.

MoMA opened its gigantic, building-filling Pablo Picasso retrospective, then closes its gigantic building for the first of several large scale rebuilding projects, each time seemingly making its space more uptight.

Jasper Johns' *Three Flags* sells for over \$1,000,000, the first time such an astronomic price is commanded by a living artist. The feeling that money is sniffing around art cannot be denied. Art and money are about to have a fling.

Signaling the arrival of more so-called "Pictures Artists," Metro Pictures Gallery opens in SoHo with a group show including the work of Brauntuch, Longo, Levine, Goldstein, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons and James Welling. I remember being scared to go in because the work seemed so hip and smart.

Walter De Maria's indoor earthwork, *New York Earth Room*, is installed at 141 Wooster Street. The piece is still there and consists of 250 cubic yards of earth, weighs 280,000 pounds, is 22 inches deep, and covers 3,600 square feet. The work can still take your breath away with its simplicity, grandeur, quietness and wonderful smell.

## **1981**

The flowering of the scrappy do-it-yourself East Village scene begins when Gracie Mansion opens a gallery in her East Village bathroom. Galleries include Fun, International With Monument, Pat Hearn, Jay Gorney Modern Art, Vox Populi, Nature Morte, Piezo Electric, Postmasters, 303, B-Side, Civilian Warfare, New Math, Cash Newhouse and many others. By 1987 the East Village scene is over, a victim of its own success, absorbed by SoHo, and ravaged by AIDS.

*O Superman*, a catchy new wave chant / song by performance artist Laurie Anderson sells over 500,000 records in the U.S. and suggests to artists everywhere that art can breakthrough to the wider public.

## **1982**

Maya Linn's Vietnam Veterans Memorial is unveiled in Washington, D.C. After being widely criticized (by billionaire Ross Perot, among others), the black marble wall filled with names of the dead is embraced by a country that until this point hated nothing more than abstract, minimalist sculpture.

Keith Haring's first solo show opens at the SoHo gallery of Tony Shafrazi (the nitwit who in 1974 scrawled the words "Kill Lies All" in spray paint on Picasso's *Guernica*). Haring's exuberant example of painting in the subways and on the streets inspired thousands of young artists to do the same. I was barely out of my 20s and yet for the first time in the art world I felt old. Prices of the sold-out works ranged between \$8,000 and \$15,000. Haring dies of AIDS in 1990 at the age of 31.

Cindy Sherman's show of centerfold photographs, self-portraits based on images from magazines, makes good on the promise of her black-and-white "Film Stills." One thing never written about Sherman is that her work revolves around a woman who loves to shop, try on clothes, pose in front of mirrors, do her make-up and take pictures. Sherman works so close to some psychological core that the core turns invisible. She's taken thousands of pictures of herself yet we still have no idea of who that self really is. Sherman's is the face that launched a thousand theories.

*New York* magazine features gallerist Mary Boone on its cover proclaiming her "The New Queen of the Art Scene."

## **1983**

David Hammons sells snowballs alongside other vendors on Astor Place. Titled *Bliz-aard-Ball Sale*, the piece reveals the complicated social ways Hammons would bring the usually cloistered Duchampian gesture into the art world and onto the streets. He reportedly earned \$20 from his efforts. Throughout his career Hammons has remained off to the side of the art-world action. Early on he said, "I can't stand art actually. I've never, ever liked art, ever."

## **1984**

Two 1984 massive MoMA missteps in one year trigger scene-altering phenomena.

"Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern," curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe, displaying modern and so-called "primitive" works side-by-side, sets off charges of "colonization" and "exploitation." A public exchange of letters between critic

Thomas McEvelley and the curators takes place in the pages of *Artforum*. Perhaps the beginning of multiculturalist theory in the art world.

Next, MoMA mounts its enormous "An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture." The exhibition has 169 artists but only 19 women. All the artists are white and from Europe or the U.S. McShine also reportedly claims that any artist who isn't in the show should rethink "his" career. As a result, the Guerrilla Girls are founded by a group of almost 100 feminists who donned gorilla masks in public. They plastered New York with humorous but pointed posters decrying acts of sexism and discrimination in the art world. As they put it on their website: "We're feminist masked avengers in the tradition of anonymous do-gooders like Robin Hood, Wonder Woman and Batman. . . . we expose sexism, racism and corruption in politics, art, film and pop culture."

### **1986**

In her 1986 work, *My Calling (Card) #1*, Adrian Piper handed out cards printed with the words, "Dear Friend, I am black. I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark." Adrian was the first so-called "post black" or "post race" artist; she put race at the center of her work in order to question race as the determining lens through which people see the world. Today Piper's ideas are being played out on the world stage in the race for the presidency.

With the four-person exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery "Neo-Geo" arrives on the scene. The show includes Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, Ashley Bickerton and the now-almost-forgotten Meyer Vaisman. The marriage of art and money is consummated in public. The year before this, Cable Gallery opened, operated by Nicole Klagsbrun and Clarissa Dalrymple, highlighting the transition from early '80s Neo-Expressionism, Graffiti and Pictures Art to artists such as Bickerton, Haim Steinbach, Christopher Wool, Steve Di Benedetto and Collier Schorr.

At the Kitchen, Karen Finley's *Yams Up My Granny's Ass* opens. As part of a demented performance piece, she smears canned yams onto and into her ass -- a move that becomes notorious. The Culture Wars of the late 1980s are about to begin.

### **1987**

After a routine gallbladder operation a private nurse, Min Chou, reportedly fails to adequately monitor his condition and overloads him with fluids, and Andy Warhol dies at 6:31 am, February 22. Warhol had been so terrified of hospitals that he would never use the word. He called it "the place." An almost instant positive reassessment of his then-disparaged late work began and continues still.

Barbara Kruger, who created one of the most readily identifiable graphic styles since Roy Lichtenstein, becomes the first female artist to join Mary Boone Gallery. She is soon joined by Sherrie Levine.

### **1988**

Showman / strongman / gremlin Thomas Krens becomes director of the Guggenheim Museum. Krens sees that culture is going to be big business and he begins to turn the sleepy, disorganized Guggenheim into a world brand. In the process he sells off parts of the museum's collection, soils some of the Guggenheim's good name, mounts attention-getting shows (some

good), sets off on real-estate boondoggles, changes the role of museums, raises the stakes across the board and builds or tries to build buildings all over the world.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, who skyrocketed to fame in the early 1980s with his prodigious, intensely painted images of words, animals, black American heroes and ne'er-do-wells, as well as his collaborations with Andy Warhol and Francesco Clemente, dies at the age of 27. Basquiat represented the gritty faster-than-life side of Haring's ebullient esthetic. In death he became a Rimbaud-like anti-hero.

### **1989**

After a nine-year-long court case, testimony by scores of art-world witnesses, repeated claims by the artist that he would forever leave the United States if his work were altered in any way, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* was removed from Federal Plaza. It was the end of one phase of Serra's work but the beginning of his museum and public-art apotheosis. He never relocated to another country.

The Culture Wars arrive as Andrea Serrano's *Piss Christ* is attacked in the U.S. Senate and the Corcoran Gallery, wary of losing grant money from the N.E.A., cancels its Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition. In retrospect, it is arguable that the curtailing of government-funded programs for the arts led directly to collectors, trustees and patrons gaining more power in institutions and slowly destroying them, making them more dependent on their wishes and whims. Thank you, politicians.

One of the most influential artists of the last 20 years, Cady Noland debuts at Colin De Land's American Fine Arts in SoHo. Her work consists of metal baskets, Budweiser beer cans, American flags and fence poles distributed willy-nilly around the gallery. It was the first time that I looked at art and didn't know what I was looking at. Noland opened the door to the esthetics of the 1990s. She is the missing link of the period. Inexplicably she doesn't show much and now exists mainly as a legend.

### **1990**

One year after Noland's debut, Felix Gonzalez-Torres debuts at Andrea Rosen. His work, often dealing with the fleetingness of life, consisted of stacks of paper that viewers were allowed to take, piles of candy that visitors were able to sample or bead curtains or lightbulbs in empty rooms. Gonzalez-Torres combined eccentric materials, formalism, love, loss and conceptualism in ways that helped create what would eventually be called "Relational Esthetics." He died of AIDS, at the age of 36, in 1996.

### **1991**

The stars aligned for Matthew Barney, 24. His solo debut at Barbara Gladstone in SoHo came *after his work appeared on the cover of Artforum*. The exhibition, which was continually packed with visitors, consisted of videos of Barney in drag dancing with a blocking sled, him dressed as a football player and crawling across Gladstone's ceiling, naked, suspended from ice screws. In the downstairs gallery we saw videos of Barney inserting an ice screw into his anus in an attempt to crawl into his own body and turn himself inside out. Barney combined Nauman, Beuys, Serra, Joan Jonas, strange materials and something so physical, dense and unknowable that he created his own mystic one-man movement.

Jeff Koons opens "Made in Heaven" at Sonnabend Gallery. The show features 31 works ranging from large silk-screened oil paintings to marble and glass sculptures depicting Koons and his wife, Ilona Staller, the Italian parliamentarian and porn star known as la Cicciolina (Little Fleshy One) having sex. Koons says, "I've always tried to exploit myself to the fullest." The show creates a sensation but the art world rejects Koons, believing he has taken his ideas of exploitation too far. He is left out of all international surveys, including Documenta. Yet in Arolsen just outside of Kassel, where Documenta was held, Koons erected *Puppy*, a 43-foot-tall topiary sculpture of a West Highland Terrier executed in 60,000 living flowers. The piece steals almost all the thunder from Documenta.

Jim Shaw mounts "Thrift Store Paintings" at Metro Pictures Gallery. This sprawling collection of more than 200 thrift store paintings done by mostly anonymous amateurs is attacked by critics, including British writer Adrian Searle, who complained that "the paintings are awful, indefensible, crapulous. . . these people can't draw, can't paint. . ." Numerous artists, nevertheless, see that this supposedly terrible exhibition opened the door to hundreds of unnamed figurative genres.

For his eye-peeling New York debut at the Daniel Newberg Gallery, Italian artist Rudolf Stingel emptied the space and covered the entire floor in a bright orange rug. "I wanted," he said, "to be against a certain way of painting." He went on to cover rooms in aluminum foil and allow visitors to carve the walls. One of the more retinally extreme painters to emerge since Pop Art and Ad Reinhardt.

## **1992**

John Currin's paintings of buxom girls, sick women and fallen fops signaled the end of big art movements once and for all. Like many artists of his generation, Currin ignored the vaunted history of abstraction and modernism in favor of a free-ranging "I'll use whatever I want" approach that involved Durer, Courbet, Norman Rockwell, ads from magazines and pictures from *Jugs*. From this point on artists are free of art history.

Rirkrit Tiravanija exhibits *Untitled (Free)* at 303 Gallery. The work consisted of Tiravanija placing all the contents of the gallery in the main space, then setting up a makeshift kitchen in what had been the dealer's office. For the entire month, Tiravanija or an assistant served free Pad Thai to whoever stopped in. Like Gonzalez-Torres, Tiravanija found a way to make an object and also give it away for free. He is the George Washington and Johnny Appleseed of "Relational Esthetics."

For his exhibition at Dia, Robert Gober created a room with a painted forest mural, sinks, old newspapers featuring images of himself in a wedding gown and boxes of rat poison. It was like walking into a fantasy of the news in paradise and hell. You were locked in and shut out; the water was always running; the clues were all there but you were left with the feeling of wonder. The "not-knowing parts" that Nauman talked about all those years before came back with a vengeance. The installation marks the beginning of many gallery-filling efforts by the artists of the next decade.

## **1993**

As the art market collapse is in full swing, the *Washington Post* reports that "in the last two years some 70 commercial galleries have closed in Manhattan." That same year, as visitors entered the 1993 Whitney Biennial, curated by Elizabeth Sussman, they were handed Daniel J.

Martinez's button emblazoned with some or all of the slogan, "I Can't Imagine Ever Wanting To Be White." The show is dubbed "the political biennial" and lambasted by critics as "awful," "grim," "flimsy," "pious," "sophomoric" and "DOA." However, the show, maybe the most memorable of its ilk, proved that New York criticism often gets things initially wrong, and included numerous artists who went on to have major careers, among them Matthew Barney, Janine Antoni, Sophie Calle, Andrea Fraser, Coco Fusco, Rene Green, Byron Kim, Zoe Leonard, Glen Ligon, Jack Pierson, Fred Wilson, Charles Ray, Sadie Benning and Lorna Simpson.

At a dinner given for Anselm Kiefer, after his opening at Marianne Goodman Gallery, raw food is served to the crème-del-a-crème of the art world as they sit at long white tables atop a floor covered with white sand, as actors mimed dance. The decadent dinner marks the last gasp of 1980s hubris. As we entered the dining hall, artist David Salle looked at me and said, "They're going to kill us all." And then he left.

The cover of the *New York Times Magazine* features Pace art dealer Arnold Glimcher with his so-called "art world all-stars," all middle-aged white men, including John Chamberlain, Donald Judd, Chick Close, Robert Mangold, Joel Shapiro, Robert Ryman, George Condo and the over-the-hill Jim Dine. The W.A.C. (Women's Action Coalition) marches in front of Pace gallery wearing gorilla masks and latex dildos. Soon thereafter, Pace takes on Elizabeth Murray and Kiki Smith. Ah, guilt and shame.

The solo debut of Maurizio Cattelan at Danny Newburg Gallery lasts less than a week. Cattelan leaves the gallery empty except for a glass chandelier and a live donkey. Children are allowed to ride the donkey. Artists in the SoHo building object to the animal being housed there and ask that the show be closed. Cattelan goes on to combine shock, humor and wit in sculptures involving a tipped over pope, a praying Adolf Hitler and a stuffed horse hanging from the ceiling.

## **1994**

After the stock market collapse in the late 1980s, a new generation of artists and dealers takes the stage. Dealers include David Zwirner, Gavin Brown, Andrea Rosen, Matthew Marks, Anton Kern, Marianne Boesky, Paul Morris, Brent Sikkema and Frederic Petzel. That year the first Gramercy Park International Art Fair, organized by dealers, is held at the Gramercy Park Hotel. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people see the 32 galleries installed on three floors of the hotel. The fair eventually turns into the behemoth known as the Armory Show and the age of the art fair is commenced.

Kara Walker's debut at the Drawing Center consists of a wall-filling black-paper silhouette frieze depicting characters from the Antebellum South killing, having sex with and wooing one another. Walker begins her march into the id of the American imagination and the buried history of race as she merges art, anger, laughter and a fierce intelligence with self-hate, self-love, guilt and reverie.

Elizabeth Peyton's New York debut is staged by dealer Gavin Brown in room 828 of the Chelsea Hotel. Visitors asked for the key to the room at the front desk, went upstairs and saw 21 small-to-medium sized black-and-white charcoal and ink drawings of dandies, Napoleon, Queen Elizabeth, Ludwig II and others. Peyton's style was a combination of Karen Kilimnik, Florine Stettheimer and fashion illustration, and opened the door to numerous artists who wanted to approach drawing in similarly un-angsty ways. The show was spellbinding.

In the early 1990s, Jason Rhoades combined the scatter art of Cady Noland, the formalism of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the relational esthetics of Rirkrit Tiravanija and the complex narrative structures of Matthew Barney and cross-wired it with testosterone-driven topsy-turvy orgies of narrative, Ikea-gone-mad, and the Chicken Ranch come to life. Rhodes' collage-assemblage kitchen-sink esthetic opened the flood gates to numerous room/atrium filling installations and exert a major pull on artists today.

### **1996**

British art star Damien Hirst has his first show at Gagosian. Americans are treated to the full-on spectacle of cut up animals, spinning paintings, a giant ashtray filled with smoked cigarette butts and mobile tanks filled with more dead animals. As America is withdrawing from its raging 1980s, British artists are all the rage, and raging all over the place.

### **1997**

Willem de Kooning dies. Having suffered from Alzheimer's disease since the late 1980s, his late paintings were lyrical icebergs of interlocking lines and planes of cool pastel colors.

### **1998**

Vanessa Beecroft stages *Show*, a one-night performance at the Guggenheim, in which 20 models, nude or in Gucci bikinis, wearing spiked heels, stand in formation for two hours. The art world stands staring at them as they stare back at the art world. Thus, Beecroft creates a perfect mirror for the experience of looking at art: You stare at it and it just stands there, hopefully doing something for you in the process. Not only does Beecroft seem to suggest that both the art and the audience are vulnerable, she illustrates how the art takes pleasure in being looked at. Talk about post-feminism.

Thomas Krens presents "Art of the Motorcycle" at the Guggenheim, in part "made possible by BMW."

British artist Rachel Whiteread unveils her first public sculpture in New York, a full sized translucent cast resin water tower atop a building in SoHo. Poetic yet incongruous, Whiteread's *Water Tower* powerfully represents a need for public sculpture to be physically present yet, paradoxically, ephemeral. Whiteread is one of the few visual artists who are better in public than in private galleries.

### **1999**

The Guggenheim Museum mounts a 400-plus work retrospective of Norman Rockwell. A phalanx of museum directors, curators and populist theorists make Rockwell the latest postmodern fad, an everyman artist that everyone can understand. I agree with what Rockwell said about his work, that it was just "feel-good" "story-pictures." My advice was and still is, "Just say no."

Ten days before Charles Saatchi's collection, "Sensation," opened at the Brooklyn Museum, angry mayor Rudolf Giuliani demanded that the show be cancelled because he objected to the elephant dung and pornographic photographs in Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*. The mayor promised to withhold \$7.2 million in museum funding and called the show "sick." An editorial the *New York Times* says Giuliani "promises to begin a new Ice Age in New York's cultural affairs." The museum sticks to its guns and leaves the painting up. However, 72-year-old

Dennis Heiner, an offended Roman Catholic, who believed the painting was "blasphemous," defaced a quarter of the painting with paint.

## **2000**

The Guggenheim presents "Giorgio Armani" after the Italian designer reportedly promises the museum a \$15 million gift.

The Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist debuts at Lühring Augustine Gallery in Chelsea with a soup-to-nuts installation of furniture, food, video, murals and music. It is the beginning of the installation extravaganzas that would evolve into the so-called "Festivalism" of the big international exhibitions. Rist's ways with color, sound and imagery, however, made her a magical, almost out-of-body artist.

## **2001**

Olafur Eliasson takes Robert Smithson's ideas about the scale and the impact of outdoor earth works and brings them indoors with an exhibition at Tanya Bonakdar in which he creates a room within the gallery with no ceiling. Later, Eliasson would go on to produce one of the most successful indoor pieces of all time when he created an abstract sun in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Museum in London. Over 1,000,000 visitors saw and were wowed by the piece. I was one of them.

## **2002**

With Chelsea growing by leaps and bounds, spaces getting bigger and grander all the time, and the art world growing more professional everyday, artist Maurizio Cattelan and curators Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick open the Wrong Gallery, "the smallest gallery in New York," in a doorway. All it was an expensive looking glass and metal door but it was a font of the old take-back-the-streets attitude of the East Village days. One show consisted only of Adam McEwen's printed sign that said, "Fuck Off We're Closed".

## **2004**

Having opened a 292,000-square-foot space in upstate Beacon, N.Y., the year before, Dia, under director Michael Govan, who was mentored by Gugg director Thomas Krens and is now the director of the Los Angeles Museum of Art, unforgivably closes down Dia's West 22nd Street building. Thus, Govan oversaw the loss of the first space in Chelsea -- one of the most important exhibition sites in the world. This is the most lamentable misstep in New York exhibition history.

## **2005**

February 12-27: Christo and Jeanne-Claude and hundreds of assistants unfurl *The Gates*, the largest -- and to me, the worst -- public art project ever mounted in New York. Stretching along 23 miles of Central Park footpaths, the glitzy project consists of around 7,500 saffron-colored panels. The estimated cost is around \$20 million, funded supposedly by the Christos. Everyone in the city seemed to come out, have a good time and then forget about this ultimately absolutely forgettable spectacle.

## **2006**

In the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the 25-year-old Ryan Trecartin collapsed the esthetics of the 1990s into a 1,000-headed synthesized singularity that is already affecting artists everywhere. Trecartin condensed queer theory, computer graphics, wild color, video, psychedelia, the

esthetics of Jack Smith, Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger into what feels like a new kind of speeded-up collaborative, a carnival sculptural-video circus combine that is already breathing life into the art world.