

JONATHAN BOROFKY

Fiona Cunningham

1987



Dancing Clown @ 2,845,325.1982/83.

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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

JONATHAN BOROFKY, DOING IT HIS WAY.

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FIONA CUNNINGHAM

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INTRODUCTION.

Since 1983 Jonathan Borofsky has been using in his installations an image of a male clown dressed as a ballerina which rotated its leg to a rendition of "I Did It My Way". It is a reflective image of Borofsky's art life up to now, referring to the ambivalence of his career as an artist, he being regarded in both high and low esteem in the art world.

In the early 70s he became known for his obsessive counting which began at "1" in 1969 with its aim to reach infinity. It was a time when through his conceptual activities he learned about his own beliefs and subconscious images, a time of self-realisation. Through this realisation he found himself using his subconscious dream images to express himself. Soon his own personal dealings were not enough for him to work with, but through them he regarded himself as man's representative. Being in such a position he felt a need to introduce political issues into his work, so as to increase society's awareness of them.

Jonathan Borofsky is unique in an art world where artists usually find themselves bound to styles. Instead he uses difference styles as tools to express the complex dualities of life, reflecting the personal with the political, and the spiritual with the material in his attempt to integrate art with life.

CHAPTER ONE

Early Learning, All Is One.

Jonathan Borofsky was born in Boston in 1942. He had an interest in art from an early age, an interest that was prompted by his mother, herself an architect and painter by profession. He studied in three art colleges:- Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg, from which he received a BFA in 1964, Ecole de Fontainebleau in France and finally he received his MFA in 1966 from Yale. After Yale Borofsky moved to New York. Where he lived for seven years prior to his first show in Artists Space, New York, 1973. During that interval of seven years he was still studying, this time not within the confines of an educational institute but in the relative freedom of his own studio. He spent this time learning about himself, going through several periods of exploration, conceptualism which he began during this break of seven years and expressionism. Both the result of the examination of his subconscious, while dependant upon his previously acquired formal training in art college. These periods could be regarded as Borofsky's early learning, specialising in the separate periods. Consequently his current styles are the applied amalgamation of all he has learned, primarily during the years after college until his first major exhibit of 1973.

Unlike many artists Borofsky is well aware of the significance of the work he did both as a child and as a student in Art College. He used this work in Age Piece

(All is One), (Fig 1), which he began in his studio in 1973. This piece traces and summarises his evolving art output from his first recorded work - age eight, to his work at that time - age thirty. Age Piece is a single work, a personal retrospective view which documents changes in his development.

" At the age of thirty, I was thinking over my evolution as an artist, and realised how many specific, concentrated groups of work there were that represented different periods in my life. I thought that it would be important to make a piece to show this evolution." (1)

In Age Piece Borofsky includes works from different stages in his development, revealing his technical and intellectual past. On the wall above each work he has written the age at which they were made. Age 24, marks a watershed between his previous object based art and his later conceptual work. This shows a large ugly lamp which was probably the ultimate end to all the objects he had previously made. Age 25 consists of sheets of yellow paper taped together, literally a section of what he covered his studio in during that time. Age 26 is a page from his Thought Book.

" Around the end of 1967 I stopped making "things" altogether. It seemed to me that painting and object making were dead. I started thinking a lot. Duchamp to Pollock, Pollock to whom, to what." (2).

Borofsky began to write down his thoughts, which consisted of numerical puzzles and universal and personal

observations, in what he called his Thought Book, this became his obsession. He realised that the notes he made and the thoughts he had were repetitive. As a release he began to count on both sides of 8.5 x 11 inch sheet of paper. "Finally I decided to count consecutively from one to whatever".(3) Age Piece 27 was a page from his counting which eventually formed a tower of stacked sheets by now four feet high. (Fig 2) Age 30 is a plan of the entire piece, which at that time accommodated blank spaces for ages 34 and 40. Borofsky did in one sense complete the piece with a drawing when he reached 40, but in reality the All Is One aspect is continuous since it refers to all his work which by nature is self-referential.

Counting was his form of meditation, discipline and learning. For two years he counted continuously without doing any other art activity. Such conceptual occupations as his Thought Book and Counting are of major importance in Borofsky's development. It was a time when he denied himself access to the formal aesthetic learning he gained as a student. Hence, his own personal emotional thoughts came to the fore, proof of this is that while counting he began to make "expressionistic scribbles" (4), (Fig 3) and personal notes. One such note which Borofsky himself regards as important is "You and I are part of the infinite Spirit of God". (5) In 1972 Borofsky decided to paint one of his autographic scribbles and, as if he was again a child of eight beginning his art education, he had to go out to buy his board and paints. The painting was naive in

style and surreal in content, a tree, with a head tied to it, in the rain and in the distance an observer stands in bright sunlight (Fig 4). (presumably an autographical work) Instead of painting his signature Borofsky signed his work numerically with the number he had reached in his counting, which was 843,956. "At that moment something special had happened I had taken the counting and linked it to the image" (6) Borofsky had made the connection between his conceptual meditative practice of counting and his image making. It became a filing system for his thoughts and images. For the thoughts and images he had reached in this expressionistic side were tagged with the corresponding number from his conceptual side. This aspect of two sides to creativity is dominant in Borofsky's work. That first painting led on to a work titled Continious Painting, 1972/73, (Fig 5) which cointains a self portrait with a plus and minus sign on the forehead referring to the two different sides of the brain.

Continious Painting is a series of paintings that look unreleated in size and style; they all refer to the different feelings Borofsky had at that time. They also are taken from illustrations in his Counting. The fact that they made such obvious references to escapism, Journeys, inner and outer feelings and childhood can be a bit off putting if not embarrassing on first impressions, considering that their content and style are very childlike for a man in his thirties. Borofsky himself refers to them as escape paintings. Work that he did about his childhood

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could come across as therapy. Such titles as Mom, I Lost The Election (Fig 6), Jana Loved Barry Siegle, Not Me, and, Dad, I Often Feel Badly Because I Was So Mean To You That Morning, seem to be dealing with rejection and unpleasant incidents in his childhood.

Such titles and images show that for Borofsky content is all important: "Real communication has nothing to do with pretty colours"(7). He uses what is available to him, firstly himself and secondly his training in the three different Art Colleges. Through the thought process of his Counting and Thought Book he has come to realise his anxieties, all his "cycles" made him aware of his recurring styles, images and states of mind. He recycles instead of discards, and example of this is his use of Still Life At Age Eight firstly in, Age Piece (Fig 1), and then again referring to it in Continious Painting (Fig 5)

"I was given the freedom at an early age to do whatever I wanted. That was important for me. Last year when I needed to learn to draw the figure a little better, I just went back to doing it. What I am getting at is that its not the traditional 'well, first you must learn to draw realistically and then you can become free to be an abstractionist'. I started free and ocassionally go back to learn what I need to learn to make a thing look real, or real enough to suit my needs". (8)

Borofsky's whole thought and work process is manipulated purely to serve his personal needs. He is constantly

questioning and searching his inner self for reasons and he regards the aim of his work as : " to understand my own pains and happiness." (9)

Lucy Lippard, Sol Le Witt and Paula Cooper played major roles in launching Borofsky's career. Lucy Lippard was very interested in Borofsky's conceptual work and showed it in several exhibitions. In the early seventies she asked him to take part in what she called "Groups" - "however this was less an art show than a visual-verbal experiment dealing with an imposed experience". (10) It was a conceptual work where Lippard chose a few people and asked them to take a photograph of five or more people in the same place and approximately in the same position in relation to each other, once a day for a week. In 1973 Sol LeWitt selected Borofsky for an exhibition in Art Space, New York in which he showed Counting (Fig 2) as a column. It was LeWitt who first suggested to Borofsky to work on large rolls of paper and then later suggested he worked directly on to the wall as he himself did.

The Paula Cooper Gallery was the site for Borofsky's first one man show in 1975, (Fig 7,8). What he did was to practically empty his studio into the gallery. This was his first installation and in it he included found objects, sculpture unframed drawings, paintings and conceptual works. An important inclusion in the show in regard to his forthcoming work was "I'm walking the streets of some strange town with my mother. I hustle with my mother and a huge crowd into a supermarket for protection ..." 2

1,944,821, 1972/73.(Fig 9) The work was very personal, it was an attempt to make a connection with viewers who had similar thoughts. The show acted as a testing ground for future ideas. For this reason there was no selection of the pieces he showed, for him it was important to show everything so that an overall impression of his thinking could be attained. The presentation of the work was purely to show not to sell. In a way Borofsky was trying to make one piece or a sense of unity out of all the works on show. The way he wanted this to happen was through the interconnections of the images and ideas by placing a number on each work in the show.

"I'm always making parts of a whole, and my installations try to make that whole clear and complete. The parts can be read individually, yet at the same time there are connections that complete them."(11)

ALL IS ONE

The first demonstration of Borofsky's "All Is One" belief was his show in Paula Cooper's Gallery in 1975 where he was trying to show the reliance of the works on one another.

"All Is One" is a translation of Persian Script that Borofsky sometimes writes on the walls of his installations. He believes that the truth he has found through his art is applicable to all mankind and indeed to all the universe. He regards himself as man's representative or shaman. In Borofsky's art there is no individual work as an individual

piece, all the work is one, all the ideas and images make references to one another. He does not seem to hold the concept of a set artistic "style" in high esteem, instead he regards it as a medium to work with, varying it depending on the visual impact desired from the subjects he expresses. For him a single style would be limiting to his concept of universality.

"As a youngster I had always been impressed by Picasso's different periods- the Blue period, the Rose period , the Saltimbanque period, the Cubist period - and that an artist could do different things, and could work in many styles" (12)

A drawing titled I dreamed I was taller than Picasso (Fig 10), shows how he has learned from Picasso but also that he has extended that knowledge of varied styles to the spiritual aspect of conveying universality. He believes that the universal truth and values of mankind are revealed through his art and these portray man as one. Thus Borofsky becomes the priest or a universal man that represents all. The same principle applies to his installations, the different objects , materials, forms, styles and ideas all form one whole. The individual parts exist in their own right but when in the form of an installation as a unit, they transcend themselves. Because of the way Borofsky works it is obvious that the content is more important than the "art work" as being anything physical such as an object in itself or an art form in itself. For Borofsky the importance of this content is that

even though he does express his own feelings, they do not only refer to himself but they are universal.

In the seventies Borofsky's awareness of "All Is One" and his learning from his thought process and meditation and investigation into his autographic images were very important to him. But in his attempt to convey this to the viewer he found the language too removed and the process of communication undeveloped. In order to convey his ideas properly he had to find a common visual language, which he felt was in his subconscious but not yet realised.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Mark Rosenthal and Richard Marshal, Jonathan Borofsky P.34.
- (2) Joan Simon, "An Interview with Jonathan Borofsky", Art In America. 97, November 1981, P. 158.
- (3) Ibid. P.158
- (4) Lucy R. Lippard, "Jonathan Borofsky @ 2,096,974", Art Forum 13, November 1974, P. 63.
- (5) Ibid. P.63
- (6) Rosenthal and Marshal, P. 36.
- (7) Lippard, P.63
- (8) Lynn Zelevansky , "Jonathan Borofsky's Dream Machine", Art News. 83.May 1984. P. 112.
- (9) Lippard, P. 63
- (10) Lippard, "Groups". Studio International. 179. P. 93
- (11) Rosenthal and Marshal, P. 106.
- (12) Ibid. P. 34.

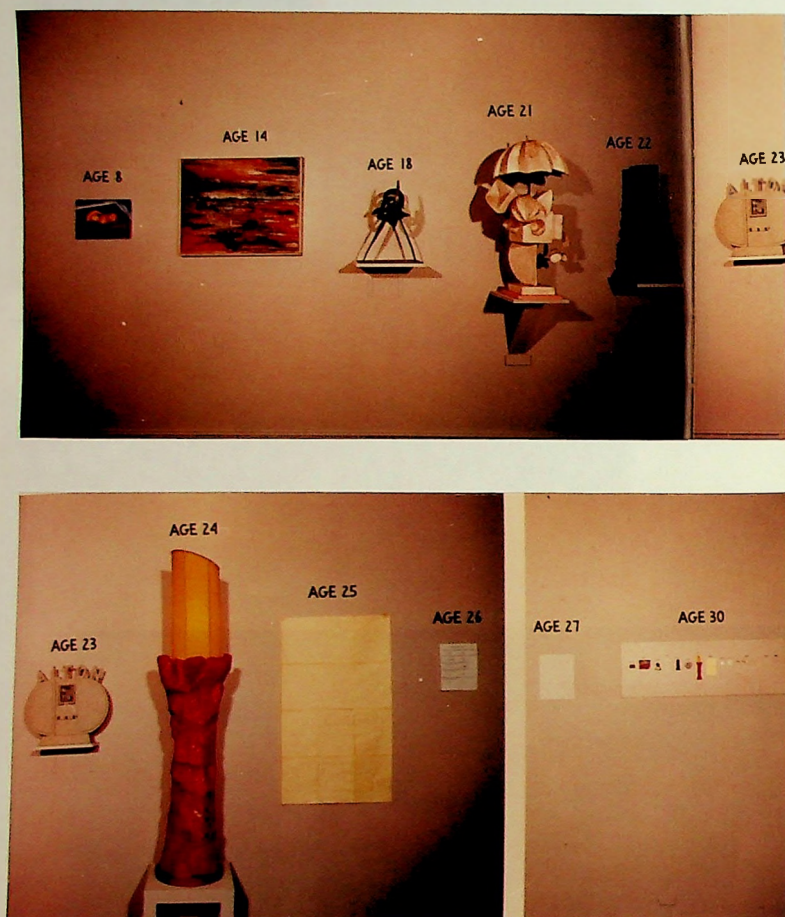


Fig. 1. Age Piece, From 1972 onwards.



Fig. 2. Counting, From 1969.

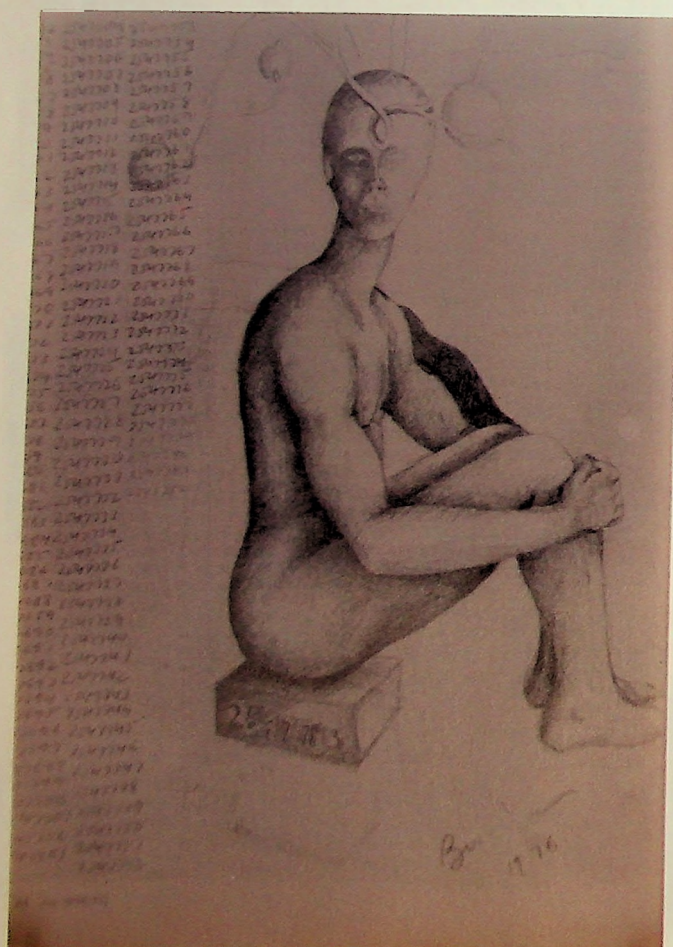


Fig. 3. Detail of Counting, Drawing.



Fig. 4. Detail of Continuous Painting. 1972/73.



Fig. 5. Continuous Painting. 1972/73



Fig. 6. Mom, I Lost The Election. 1972



Fig. 7. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1975.



Fig. 8. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1975.



Fig. 9. @1,944,821. 1972/73.



Fig.10. I Dreamed I Was Taller Than Picasso @ 2,047,324.1973

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC USE OF DREAMS

Borofsky used the structure of dreams in two ways ; firstly in constructing a visual language from his own subconscious images and in doing so coming to terms with the anxieties these images depicted in himself and secondly the public use in conveying his ideas to the audience through both the language and the visual structure of dreams.

His major subject matter is himself and through counting he became more aware of his own state of mind. The drawings he did on his pages of counting were surreal and from the subconscious, (Fig 3). His decision to use imagery as well as counting was also a decision to use dreams, this is seen in Continuous Painting (Fig 5), with its accumulation of dream images. He was very interested in the different images his subconscious produced. "So I decided to continue like the counting, I now had a continuous shift of images, styles , as well as a record of my own changing psychological states of mind." (1)

When he first started to record his dreams he would lie in bed in a semi- dream state and when a dream which he regarded as important became vivid he would sketch it on a sheet of notepaper. A lot of Borofsky's dream drawings refer to his childhood such as "I dreamed I asked my father what the matter was and he said his tooth was bleeding" @

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2,189,449 (Fig 11), "I dreamed my parents house was under attack from foreigners" @ 2,220,760 (Fig 12). His long eared animal (Fig 13) is like a child's imaginative friend.

When Gaston Bachelard talked about dreams in relation to childhood in his book The Poetics of Reverie he said:

"The potential childhood is within us all . . . When we go looking for it in our reveries we re live it even more in its possibilities than in its reality.....

We dream of everything that it could have been; we dream at the frontier between history and legend. To reach the memory of our solitudes , we idolise the world in which we were solitary children. So it is a problem in practical psychology to take into account the very real idealization of childhood memories and the personal interest we take in all childhood memories. And for that reason there is communication between poet of childhood and his reader through the intermediary of the childhood which endures within us"(2).

The use of the potential child within us all is a very important aspect of Borofsky's work. His style of painting at that time was childlike and dreamy. They were not supposed to appeal to the viewer for their composition, colour and drawing but instead to enter the viewer's mind and to identify with the viewer's own subconscious. It was the content and the communication of these dreams that was important for Borofsky. He was serious about trying to communicate with the viewer using the subconscious language, although he was not a reader he

did study Freud and Jung. "I read some Freud and Jung after I began to do dreams." (3)

Within Brofosky's subconscious vocabulary he has used flowers to symbolise his mother, boats his father, two trees his parents, light his home, a ruby his soul and his heart, and a light or book on a head to represent knowledge. A split head refers to psychological traumas and pointed Zears refer to antennas. He regards his blind musician as : "an icon for the artist who possesses interior sight" (4)

The main activity or emotion he expresses through symbolism is escapism. The running figures which turn up in different forms in both his painting and sculpture symbolise Borofsky fleeing from something, what that something is depends on where these running figures are sited. In the Zeitgeist Exhibition in West Berlin 1982 the Running Man was painted on the Berlin Wall. It stood for a figure running from the fear of the future that the wall portrayed. The figure also stood for Brofosky working amongst some of the most notable artists in the world and his fear for not being able to keep up with the standards set by the art scene.

The Running Man originated from a painting Brofosky did in 1973 titled "I want to run away " @ 2,153,386 (Fig 14).

Other symbols of escapism are the use of skating, tight rope walking and flying figure (Fig.28,15). All are moving figures but moving in a way that is particularly difficult to humans, another aspect of Borfosky trying to take man beyond his usual capabilities.

There are quite a few dichotomies in Brofosky's work. One of the earliest examples of this is a panel in Continuous Painting (Fig 5) where he depicts the positive and negative side of his brain:

"The left and right side of the brain like positive and negative charges or like Ying and Yang.

According to Eastern thinking, the goal is apparently to get beyond dualities to a new kind of energy... which propels things."(5)

Although Borofsky had no formal spiritual training the meditative aspect of counting did lead to an interest in Zen, and for a time he worked with a metaphysician and councilor. He believed in the transcendent nature of art. Borofsky has also depicted the male and female side of himself in his work.

"Dreams (Reve,m.) and reveries (reverie, f.) dreams (songes,m.) and daydreams(songerie,f.) memories (souvenir,m) and remembrance (souvenance,f.) are all indication of a need to make everything feminine which is enveloping the soft above and beyond the two simply masculine designations of out states of mind."(6)

In My Male Self, My Female Self @ 2,468,007, 1977/79, (Fig 16), there is a vast mixture of images but the main action shows a man and a woman having a tug of war through some spiritual image: "It is a male figure and a seemingly more female figure, but both are me..... a blending of my male self and my female self." (7) The style of this painting is very dreamy and psychedelic. This doesn't bother Borofsky he has written a friends criticism on the wall next

to it: "Chas said this painting was 'too Don Juan' to show that it is not the style that is important, but the content. A constant play between good and evil is also a frequent subject matter in his work. Not only did Borofsky do work about such a topic but he also regards himself as "good" enlightening an evil world, comparable to a shaman or magician. He uses his mind to conjure up his work where the material is of second importance, the consequence of seeing his work can have a great effect of changing the viewer's mind. Brofosky's vocabulary is very personal and originates from himself, but yet it has a universality. He can walk into an empty gallery and change it into a mystical place by referring to his collection of personal sketches he carries with him to every exhibition. His art is very private and requires the viewer to refer to his/her own private emotions. The viewer who fails to do this could quite easily find Borofsky's work trivial. For to understand fully Borofsky's art the images have to be allowed to transcend themselves. As an example here is a quote from Borfosky talking about the ears on his animal images (Fig 13) which have a worldly and spiritual association:" Dogs or animals or hearing or, if nothing else two points heading up towards the heavens to receive energy. Antenna receiving and sending energy". (8)

After arriving at the universal vocabulary of dreams Borofsky wanted to convey these images more directly to the audience. He began to use the structure of dreams to set up

his installations. He rejected the hard core conceptualism he was practising in the sixties because for him it did not succeed in conveying the ideas he since had.

" Conceptual art was reaching nobody. At least mine wasn't. Nobody wanted to go up and read those texts close up and try to understand them. All these diagrams, they didn't matter much. Yeah, I thought I wanted to reach a larger audience without prostituting myself, but I wanted to reach people in a common language - words and images. As a youngster I had never made a totally abstract painting. There was always something there. I dripped the paint down the canvas when I was fourteen, because I liked de Kooning and those people, and then I'd take a rag and start rubbing until some image came fourth that connected up to the real world".(9)

He tries not to conceptualise, instead he wants to communicate with the viewer on a pre- rational level, he wants to bypass the aesthetic questioning that the viewer is encouraged to give most contemporary painting. Avoidence of this was the main reason for his working directly on to the wall, he first worked on the wall in Age Piece. To get his ideas directly across to the viewer not only does he use a common subconscious vocabulary from his dreams, he also uses tools of dreams in that his installations are arranged in a dreamlike manner, images mixed together going from the wall to the floor to the ceiling and broken images. Brofosky treats each

installation room as a three dimensional painting, formally making choices about colour, shape, line and how each image plays off the next on adjoining walls. Just as important to an installation as these formal considerations is his attention to his own moods, his observations and impressions of the city in which he is showing. Borofsky's installing of his work could be called a performance but for the fact he doesn't wish it to be: "Some how it didn't suit me . Maybe I'm just too private, or something".(10) His installations are a visual expression of his own mind. Full of self representations, heads, faces, brains, running silhouettes and self portraits. The viewer is bombarded with images, walking into a Borofsky installation is like a dream of walking into his mind. He is so aware of this that sometimes he paints a head around and over the doorways of the installations, (Fig 17)

Borofsky used an opaque projector to enlarge his images on to the wall. This process allowed him to transfer the images anywhere in the room, from the ceiling onto the wall or around corners. Images drawn in such a way can only be read fully from where the projector was situated during the drawing. When such an image is looked at from a different angle the image becomes distorted. (Fig 18). So it is only on walking around the installation that some of the images are realised because, from a different angle, it is hard to visualise them. Such broken imagery adds to the dreamlike quality of Borofsky's work.

"I would find the key point of three dimensional architectural interest in a room, the one I could do most with and play with the two dimensional possibilities of a painting trying to bring the two together.....the "blimp" (Fig 19,20) was a major piece in Irvine. It was a unique painting that was on four surfaces.... I also wanted to activate the entire space, not just one point in it. I wanted to make you feel you were inside an environment. I began to work as if on a painting". (11)

The Surrealists used dream images to show the mystery and complexity of dreams whereas Borofsky depicts his dreams literally and then selects the ones that he thinks are more accessible to a wider public. Although through the literal depiction of his dreams Borofsky is giving an insight into his own psychological make up, the installations themselves can be quite impersonal. The reason for this might be a result of Borofsky's selection of which images to show. He is depicting his subconscious imagery so that the viewer can realise his own. The dreamlike structure was a major part in such a realisation.

In the same way that a dream is a way of compressing time so are Borofsky's images when they refer to various points in the past. Yet in his installations Borofsky no longer connects these images to "his" past by writing a narrative to the dream as he used to do in earlier dream paintings, on top of this Borofsky has developed a more recognisable drawing style for his installations, one which is immediate

and direct from the use of an opaque projector, with a manner of drawing which is totally his own. These developments have worked in two ways, the process has become more personal and the images more universal. *1961 Rosenthal*

(2) Gordon Seashell, *Portrait of Rosenthal*, p. 101

(3) John Saxon, "An Interview with Jonathan Rosenthal", *Art in America*, 27, November 1961, p. 140.

(4) Rosenthal and Marshall, p. 14

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 14

(6) Rosenthal, p. 27

(7) Rosenthal and Marshall, p. 24

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 14

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 14

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 14

(11) Rosenthal and Marshall, p. 117

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Mark Rosenthal and Richard Marshal, Jonathan Borofsky
P.37
- (2) Gaston Bachelard, Poetics of Reverie, P.101
- (3) Joan Simon, "An interview with Johantan Borofsky", Art
in America. 97, November 1981, P.163.
- (4) Rosenthal and Marshal, P.16
- (5) Ibid. P. 16
- (6) Bachelard, P. 29
- (7) Rosenthal and Marshal, P. 64
- (8) Ibid, P. 14
- (9) Simon, P. 165
- (10) Ibid, P.165
- (11) Rosenthal and Marshal, P. 117.

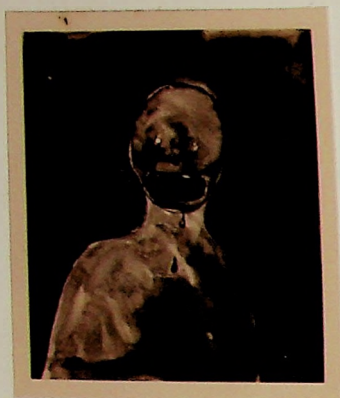


Fig.11. I Dreamed I Asked My Father What The Matter Was And
He Said His Tooth Was Bleeding. @2,139,449.1974.



Fig.12. I Dreamed My Parents House Was Under Attack From
Foreigners @ 2,220,760. 1973/74.



Fig.13. Oldi Stempf @ 2,738,441. 1982

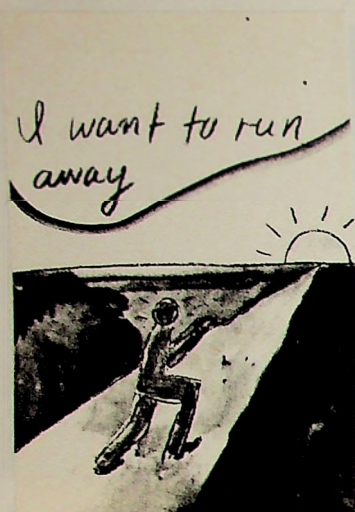


Fig.14. I Want To Run Away @ 2,153,386. 1973.



Fig.15. I Dreamed I Could Fly 1978.



Fig.16. My Male Self, My Female Self. 1977/79.



Fig.17. Drawing of Head Over Doorway, Thomas Lewellen
Gallery, Los Angeles. 1978.

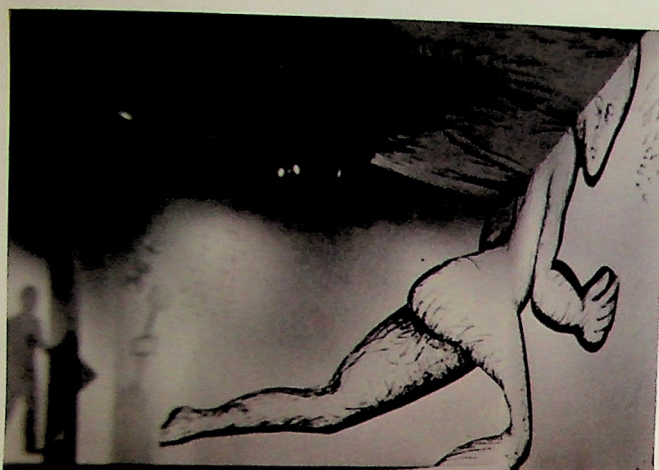


Fig.18. Running Man. Hayden Gallery, Cambridge, 1980.



Fig. 19. Blimp University of California, Irvine, 1977.



Fig.20. Blimp University of California, Irvine, 1977.

CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL ASPECTS OF BOROFKY'S WORK

Borofsky felt that in order to reach a universal audience not only did he have to have a universal language of dreams but he also needed a subject matter which would have universal consequences. In the early eighties his work became more political. Such aspects of his work are depicted as a reality, as the way it is. The purpose of this is mainly to inform the audience of the way Borofsky sees it. The dominant political issues that Borofsky tends to deal with are Nazism, the Arms Race and mans role, depicted by his role, in society. The dominant figures that he works with to depict his political issues are the Running Man, the Flying Man, the Hammering Man, Man With Briefcase, the Chattering Man and the Molecule Man. It is usually the site where the characters are set that dictates the political issues that Borofsky depicts in his shows.

All the characters that Borofsky shows have originated from himself:- " I see myself as partly every person and visa versa. Therefore, no matter how personal I get about myself my work is going to have meaning for somebody else." (1) Because of Borofsky's attitude towards himself as universal man and the wish for his subject matter to have universal appeal he became a critic of modern life. He regards himself as "good" exposing the "bad" in the world. In 1983 Borofsky had a show in the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. (Fig 21,22.) The two, three dimensional, autographic,

cutout characters present were Molecule Man and Chattering Man. There were about ten Chattering Men which consisted of figurative wooden cutouts (Fig 22) with motorised jaws and a sound track that said "Chatter, chatter, chatter, chatter." The Molecule Men in the show were a group of two apparently wrestling and one carrying a briefcase. They also consisted of figurative cutouts which have been drilled with holes (Fig 21). The cutouts which act as silloutes in the installations stand for man but then again it could be any man echoing Borofsky's theory "All is One". Both Chattering Man and Molecule Man demonstrate how Borofsky generalises from the personal to the universal. Primarily Molecule Man originated as a conceptual piece. It was a literal attempt at the dematerialization of the art object, getting space to penetrate the object by drilling holes in it. In Chattering Man the chattering has to do with mans constant influx of worries, ideas and fantasies. In a way it reflects the frenzied mind Borofsky had at the time of his Thought Book which was calmed by Counting. Yet this comment on the minds chattering refers to everybody. "Yes, its me, but its everyone I've talked to. I mean, I know I am not alone. We are all chattering".(2)

Borofsky's political concerns vary from the Arms Race to Litter. The best example of a conglomeration of his concerns is the 1980 exhibition in the Paula Cooper Gallery. (Fig 23,24) in which the obvious political images were ; request not to litter leaflets, a hammering man, a ping pong table near the American Defence Budget , a large drawing of

a Cambodian mother which was shown in the middle of the floor leaning on a pole and a barbeque, which for Borofsky represents the ovens used during the Nazi oppression of the Jews. The rest of the images in the show were taken from Borofsky's dreams. For Borofsky the image of the Hammering Man symbolises the worker, the image was not taken from his dreams but from an image he found of a Tunisian shoemaker (Fig 25). This silhouette of a man hammering (with the aid of a motorised arm) can vary from twelve feet to thirty feet in height, depending on which exhibition. It symbolises the worker not just Borofsky as a worker but the worker in everybody.

Victims of oppression feature frequently, such as ; Cambodians, Seals, dead or imprisoned animals and prisoners. The drawing of the Cambodian Mother (Fig 26) was taken from a newspaper photograph, one end of the pole which props it up touches the woman's forehead, the other end touches the floor of the gallery. Borofsky is trying to make this image a reality in two ways. Firstly the image itself, so often made distant by repetition, the pole touches the woman's mind and connects it with the space of the viewer (the floor) making the viewer concentrate on the woman's possible thoughts. Secondly, the two dimensional drawing is made more of a reality in the space by propping it up on the floor and making it a three dimensional work. What could be regarded as a "fun-pun" or should we say contradiction was the inclusion of the request not to litter leaflets as litter in the exhibition (not to mind the refuse

bag of rubbish) . Borofsky found the original leaflet in his home town of Venice, California and decided to include it in the show. It read:

"Littering is an indication of a sick mind. Who that litter is either sick or can't help it, or an "ass hole" that don't care what they doing to their earth . Every litter-bit truely does hurt folks and I don't need anyone telling me, what I can see, do thee??. If I catch you littering my earth any day, along the way, I'm going to pick it up and shake it in your face and if you catch me littering your earth, please, I beg you, for your sake, if not mine, pick it up and shake it in my face too". (3)

The Ping pong table was shown in three differnet exhibitions in 1980 . One of them was in Paula Coopers Gallery. (Fig 23) It consisted of a ping pong table with one side painted black with a white plus sign on it and the other side painted white with a black minus sign. Above it hung a light with a sign that read " Feel free to play". The idea originated as a parallel between sport and life. It had to do with winning or losing, competition or "sport" (co-operation) and ying and yang. In this case it also had to do with USA v's USSR because the two countries defense budgets for 1980 were written on a wall near it - personal play as a comparison for universal play. This was the first example of the viewers physical participation in a Borofsky exhibition, people could participate and also be watched as part of the exhibition. The notice "Feel free

to play" has a quite satirical meaning. It referred directly to both the literal execution of it as "Feel free to play" on the ping pong table and to the USA V's the USSR Arms Race and the apparent attitude that they treated it as a game. "The ping pong table is everything: installation, content, sculpture, painting, sound, and participating piece. Its the ultimate work for me". (4) Another important piece in that Paula Cooper exhibition was Hammering Man (Fig 27) . It was his first appearance previously he appeared as a Tunisian shoemaker Fig 29. It stood among Borofsky's objects and drawings and symbolised the artist, continuously making. What the Hammering Man symbolises changes depending on what site he is shown in. Sometimes he can come across as an oppressed or violent figure , yet it is always making. In "Art Forum" magazine in 1980 Borofsky did a series of drawings in which the Hammering Man was included with the Polish word "strajk" written above him. This time he was a symbol of the Polish workers strike . "Strike by then had two opposite meanings - to work or not to work" (5) In the Walker Arts centre in 1984 Borofsky's Hammering Men referred to Apartheid in South Africa. The figures were working in a gallery you entered by passing coal trucks, on the wall Biko and Mandella were written and copies of a letter from Bishop Desmond Tutu were placed on the floor, they read :- "It is no more a political issue for men and women of conscience than support of Nazism is a political issue. It is a moral issue." (6)

The issue of Natzism has also been donimant in Borofsky's work, as he himself was brought up a Jew. On first moving to Los Angles he had a dream called " I dreamed that some Hitler type person was not allowing everyone to roller skate in public places. I decided to assassinate him but I was informed by my friend that Hitler had been dead a long time and if I wanted to change anything I should go into politics. It seemed like a good idea since I was tired of making art and was wondering what to do with the lost half of my life" @ 2,566,499. In 1974 he drew it on the wall of Paula Coopers Gallery (Fig 28). Borofsky sees himself as both the oppressor and the victim stopping himself from being free.

"I was living in California when I had this dream. And maybe I was having trouble making art ; maybe I wanted to do something more with my life, for people, for the state of the world. Maybe I'll go into politics, and lo and behold. about two years later I found myslef getting much more political in my work, in my statements, in the context of shows." (7).

Borofskys inclusion of an oven on barbcue in his show as in a Paula Cooper Gallery show of 1980 originated as a play on the art object, (he also included a cabbage in that show) but after a man called Todd Gast told him that Gast in German means guest Borofsky wrote on the oven "gast means guest in German" thus giving the art object a political meaning. (Fig 29) is a photograph of Borofsky with a selection of his numbers printed on him, not only does it

refer to the tattooing of Jews by Nazi's but also the the fact that Borofsky is his work - "All is One".

Borofsky's participation in the 1982 Zeitgeist exhibition in West Berlin was probably one of the most political based installations he has yet done. The reason for this was the site in which the exhibition was held, it was the Martin-Gropius - Bau which borders the Berlin Wall and from where you can see into East Berlin. When previously dealing with site specific work Borofsky dealt with the physical make up of the room and then introduced his feelings about the space into the work, whereas with the Zeitgeist Exhibition the physical character of the Gropious building was dominated by its political history. So Borofsky found himself using his vocabulary to communicate his opinion on the political "site" of the exhibition while still using the physical site to its fullest.

The figures Borofsky included in the exhibition were Man with Briefcase (Fig 30) and Flying Man (Fig 31) and Running Man (Fig. 32) The subconscious images he used were a bird and ruby. He worked both inside and outside the building. In the skylight of the main centre hall he put Man with Briefcase. The figure was forty foot long and seemed to hover above observing all that was going on below. This image originated as a self portrait of Borofsky travelling from exhibition to exhibition with his sketches and ideas in his briefcase ready to be installed in the

various sites, yet like his other images their meaning changed depending on their location.

"If I do Man with Briefcase in Zeitgeist in Berlin above a piece by Joseph Beuys that is on the floor, and he is there working with his hat on while the Man with Briefcase on the ceiling above him has a hat on and everyone comes up to me and says 'is that Joseph Beuys?' or 'is that the organisers of the exhibition, the money behind the whole thing?' - well those are two different possibilities partly set up by the context" (8)

In the other space given to him in the building Borofsky drew his pink Rubies and Bird on the wall, (Fig 33) he also wrote one of his dreams :- "I dreamed I was telling some person off. At first it was 'Nazi -type' person and then it changed into a Chinese. I was saying 'You don't feel ! you don't feel!'". The Rubies and Bird formed a haven from what was reality outside . The Rubies represent the heart or soul and the Bird freedom. Outside the window of this space Flying Man (Fig 34) could be seen. It was one of the three works set up outside the confines of the gallery. Flying Man is a painted polystyrene portrait of Borofsky, it was suspended outside the gallery and looked as if it was flying over the Berlin Wall towards East Berlin. Borofsky placed a large cut out Ruby on the site of the Gestapo Torture Chambers (Fig 35) and drew his Running Man on the Berlin Wall. (Fig 32). All these site works outside the building were an attempt by Borofsky to bring some reality

on human presence to the oppressive constructions man himself had built, it was his emotional answer to the political situation that divided the city.

"When I first went to the site of the Zeitgeist show to propose a piece, I kept in mind that I would use the Wall. Here I am painting on walls my whole life, inside museums, and here was the ultimate wall - the division in all of us, symbolic in a country of the division of two Germanys. Its also by the site of the Gestapo Torture Chambers, which I read a lot about as a child, being a Jew, and was very touched by... So I started putting the image on the wall. The Running Man is that, it is a way of trying to put a hole in the wall but symbolically. The image itself is one of ambiguous fear, running, tension and anxiety". (9)

Borofsky's participation in Zeitgeist demonstrates his understanding of site - physically, politically and emotionally.

In 1981 Borofsky did an installation in the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, (Fig 36). He included in it Man with Briefcase, Flying Man, Ping Pong Table and various other sketches and wall drawings from his collection. New images he used were a metal bin lid , and an oval spotlight of magenta which shone on the wall.(Fig 37). This installation is another example of site specific work with a political slant. Because the I.C.A. Gallery is below ground level the windows near the ceiling of the Gallery are

in line with the pavement and road outside. Borofsky decided to amplify the noise from the outside into the interior, this time bringing the reality of the outside into the gallery. The image of the bin lid was taken from a newspaper photograph of a woman banging a bin lid on the ground during a protest in Northern Ireland.

"I was thinking about the conflict in Ireland, which was in the news at the time... I didn't know what the hell was going on in Ireland and still don't understand these groups. But it was another of these absurdities of the planet that got to me, and although I didn't quite understand why they were banging those ashcan lids on the street, I just knew what it was about. It is like scaring off the evil demons by making a lot of noise. The photograph showed them on their knees and I thought I had to bring this image into the work." (10)

The beam of pure coloured light in the show was Borofsky's way of adding calm, to both the chaotic layout of the installation and the noise.

Borofsky sees himself as man's representative on a universal level. Representing all through his various images which originate from himself, are self-referential but also refer to man in general. Such a roll dictates to Borofsky the use of his vocabulary to gain a greater awareness among society of political issues that are important to him. Such issues varied depending in the city Borofsky found

himself in and the political and physical aspects of that city which influenced him at that time.

(11) Mark Kowitz and Richard Marshall, Jonathan Borofsky,
P. 176.

(12) Lynn Zeligson, "Jonathan Borofsky's Break Machines",
Artforum, 23, May 1984, P. 125.

(13) Kowitz and Marshall, P. 182.

(14) Ibid, P. 186.

(15) Joan Simon, "An Interview with Jonathan Borofsky",
Art in America, 77, November 1981, P. 125.

(16) Sandy Noyes, State of the Art, P. 37.

(17) Simon, P. 125.

(18) Zeligson, P. 125.

(19) Marshall, P. 81.

(20) Kowitz and Marshall, P. 186.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Mark Rosenthal and Richard Marshal, Jonathan Borofsky
P. 176.
- (2) Lynn Zelevensky, "Jonathan Borofsky's Dream Machine",
Art News. 83. May 1984. P.110.
- (3) Rosenthal and Marshal, P. 150.
- (4) Ibid. P. 146.
- (5) Joan Simon, "An interview with Jonathan Borofsky"
Art in America. 97. November 1981. P 165.
- (6) Sandy Nairne , State of the Art. P. 57.
- (7) Simon. P.162.
- (8) Zelevensky. P. 111.
- (9) Nairne. P. 51.
- (10) Rosenthal and Marshal. P. 164.



Fig.21. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1983.



Fig.22. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1983.



Fig.23. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1980.



Fig.24. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 1980.



Fig.25. Tunisian Shoemaker. 1976.



Fig.26. Cambodian Mother. Paula Cooper Gallery, 1980.



Fig.27. Hammering Man. Paula Cooper Gallery, 1980.

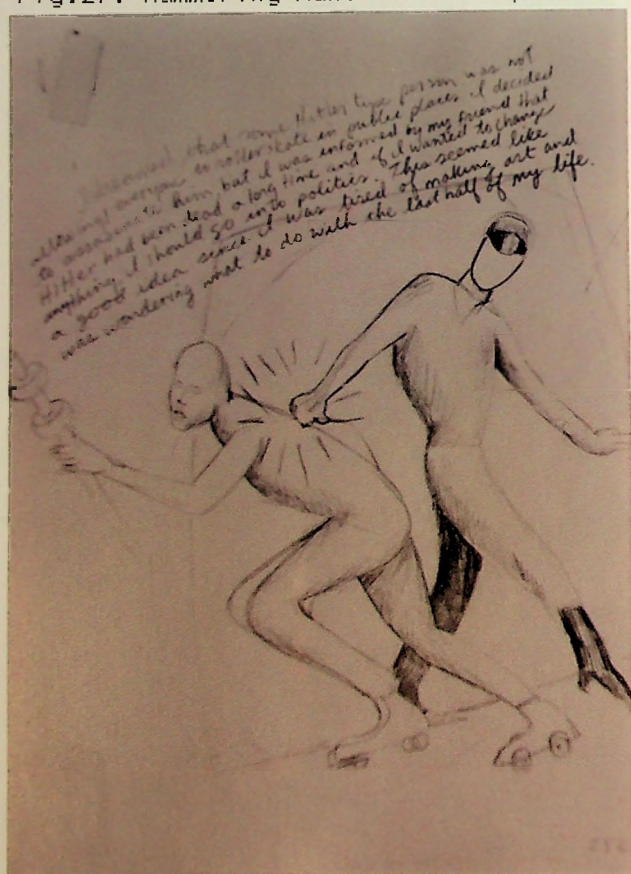


Fig.28. I Dreamed That Some Hitler Type Person Was Not
Allowing Everyone To Rollerskate In Public Places
@ 2,566,499. 1979.

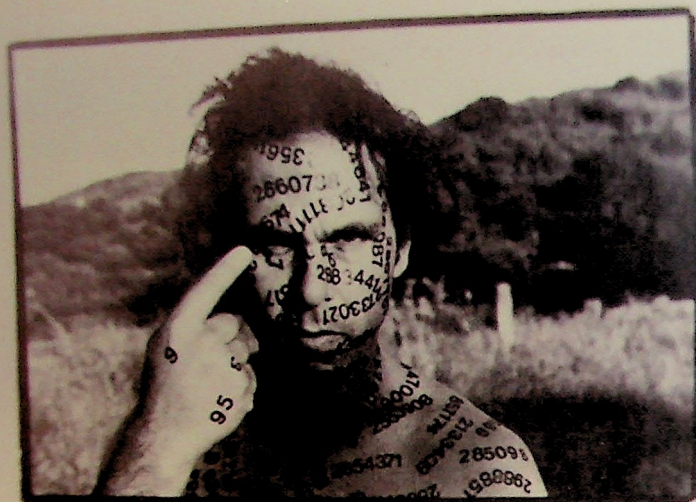


Fig.29. Self Portrait 1980.



Fig.30. Man With Briefcase. Zeitgeist. 1982.



Fig.31. Flying Man. Kunsthalle, Basel. 1981.



Fig.32. Running Man, Berlin Wall. 1982.



Fig.33. Bird And Rubies, Zeitgeist, 1982



Fig.34. Flying Man, Zeitgeist,. 1982.



Fig.35. Ruby On Site Of Gestapo Torture Chambers, Zeitgeist
1982.



Fig.36. Detail Of Installation, I.C.A. London. 1981.



Fig.37. Detail Of Installation, I.C.A. London. 1981.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ambivalence and Conflict.

Ambivalence and conflict could be regarded as the most basic theme throughout Borofsky's work as a whole. His self selection as representative of man makes us wonder is it his own ego conflicting with his compassion for others? or is it purely his need to communicate his real feelings? Seeing as Borofsky is such a part of the Art Scene of the 80's it is impossible to ignore that and just concentrate on his work. He has been included in the Saatchi catalogue Art of our Time and more recently in State of the Art. Borofsky did a work called Acrylic on Unprimed Canvas with Bubble Wrap with Duct Tape, 1978/80. (Fig 38) The image painted was flowers in a vase, it shows his disapproval of art as an investment, yet Borofsky's "scribbles" in his Thought Book or just on a piece of paper have sold for around \$2000 each. The fact is that Borofsky is critically and commercially a successful artist when associated with the Art Scene. Although his installations and manner of working look unsalable many have been taken from the whole and sold as separate pieces, which indeed they can be regarded as. Yet not all of it is salable such as the drawings he does on to the wall that after exhibitions are painted over - another conflict in Borofsky's work; the salable verses the unsalable.

"There is nothing like a 100 foot painting on a ceiling: there is no painting on canvas that is going

to be like that. There is something about it, it envelops you, it takes you over, and its real and its there in a different way from a movable, portable canvas. So I've made many of these almost to fight the system, and yet I'm not against the system. I'm part of the system. I just have this dual feeling about it, \$2000 for a scribble - thats the going price By playing the game I've got myself into an arena where at least I have the chance to speak about more serious things" (1)

Borofsky himself believes that the spiritual is more valuable and tries to show in his work the immateriality of art: - "I am not attached to the precious object and I refuse to become attached to it. My best paintings are gone. The best ones were painted on pieces of architecture, corners, ceilings. Those are unreproducible." (2) Yet he makes objects out of his thoughts, his conceptual act of counting has become a very precious art object, on which he sometimes uses his image of a ruby representing his heart as a paperweight. Counting (Fig 2) has even sometimes been shown under a glass box. His Thought Book is another example of his thoughts becoming an object, "my thought process is an object" (3)

Because Borofsky regards himself as mans universal representative he has to spread himself over a wide area. When dealing with political issues in his work, he tends to dilute the importance of the issue by his lack of knowledge of the situation. An example of this was the inclusion of

the political situation in Northern Ireland in his show in the I.C.A. London. (Fig 36). The image he used was a banging metal bin lid, such an image was only relevant to a very limited audience and the chances of them seeing that image in the I.C.A. was also very limited. In a way with regards to political issues he has spread himself to far too thinly. Yet again Zeitgeist was an example of a great understanding of the political situation in Berlin?. Another conflict, but showing Borofsky as human, not universal, yet still in the constant struggle to be universal.

The images Borofsky uses can come across as very corny and embarrassing such as Mom, I Lost The Election (Fig 6). The reason for this is probably because he has not made allowances for the viewer who does not have the same sense of openness and spirituality as he has, instead of making allowances he tries to reach the viewers sense of "spirit" and until the viewer can appreciate its importance over material the work will continue to be superficial.

Borofsky through his work has shown that art is not about style or taste but ideas , but the question lies with the future and can his successful blending of style and techniques and the constant manipulation of the image survive familiarity, or will it seek comfort in it? This depends on when Borofsky regards his vocabulary as established, and seeing as his solution to human problems is continued practice at the remaking and awareness of the

self, the threat of familiarity seems distant, as his vocabulary will expand with experience.

In reality all Borofskys work is about conflict and his whole thinking is based on it. His art reflects the uncertainty of society and he is trying to confront it through presenting it. He is a translator not a reproducer. Mans representative, portraying a common way of thinking and the conflict that is unavoidable; between rational and emotional, material and spiritual, Ying and Yang, positive and negative, the male and female self, a Western form of energistic representation and an Eastern philosophy. It is only through self analysis resulting in self awareness that an understanding of these conflicts can be attained.

"I'm beginning to use the ruby, like all my images, to reflect multiple meanings..... the body looking at its own head and the ruby between them implies self awareness or a state of looking to oneself for purification and a state of perfection".(4)

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Sandy Nairne, State of the Art. P. 15
- (2) Lynn Zelevensky, "Jonathan Borofsky's Dream Machine",
Art News. 83. May 1984. P. 112.
- (3) Jonathan Borofsky, Thought Book. P.M154.
- (4) Joan Simon, "An Interivew With Jonathan Borofsky"
Art in America. 97. November 1981. P. 163.



Fig.38. Acrylic On Unprimed Canvas With Bubble Wrap With
Duct Tape. 1978/80.

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