

MULLICAN'S
WORLD



by

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MULLICAN'S WORLD

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BY

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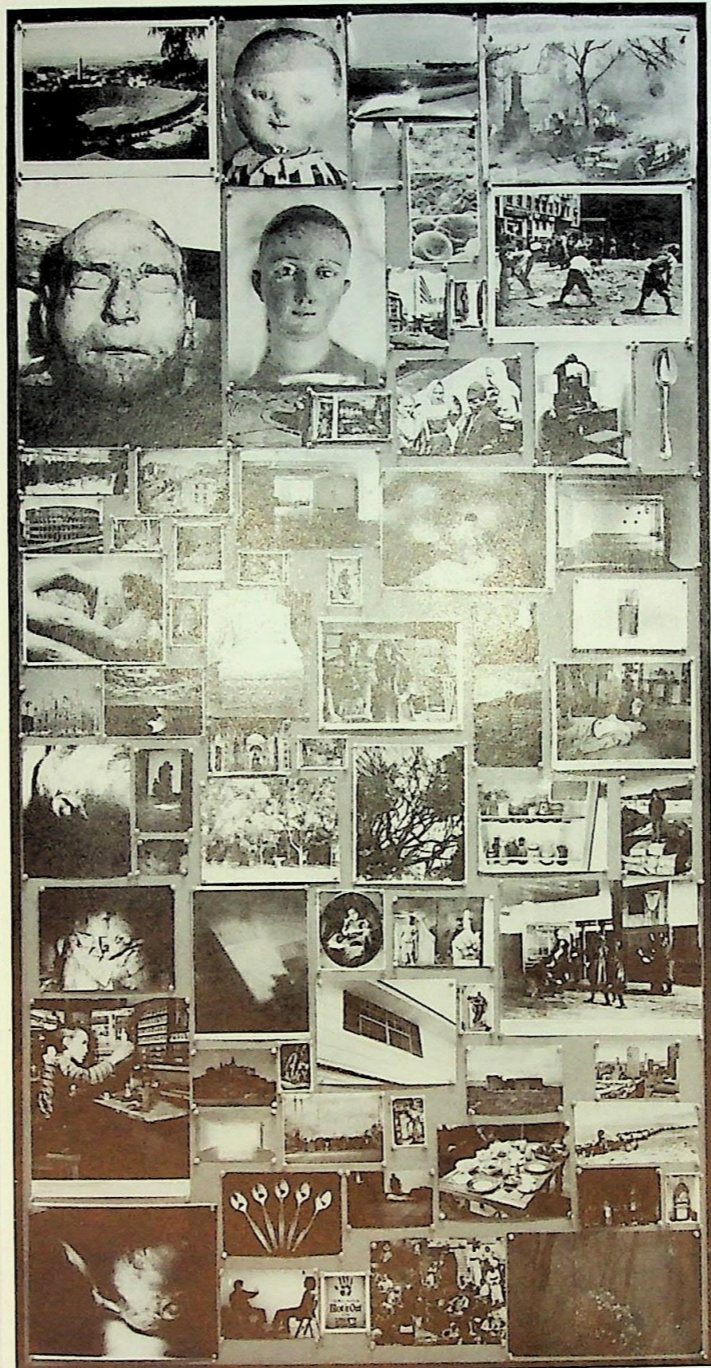
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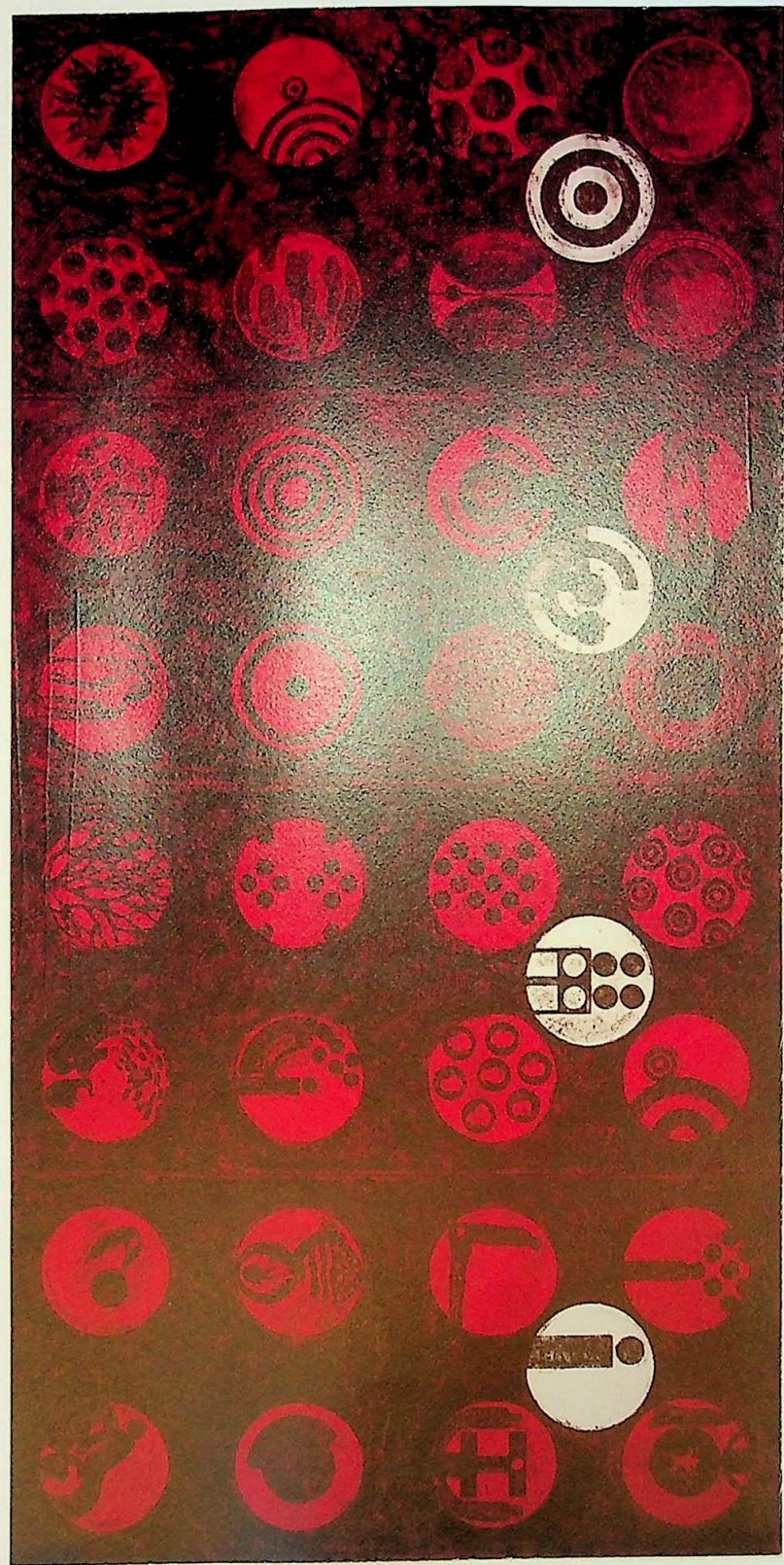
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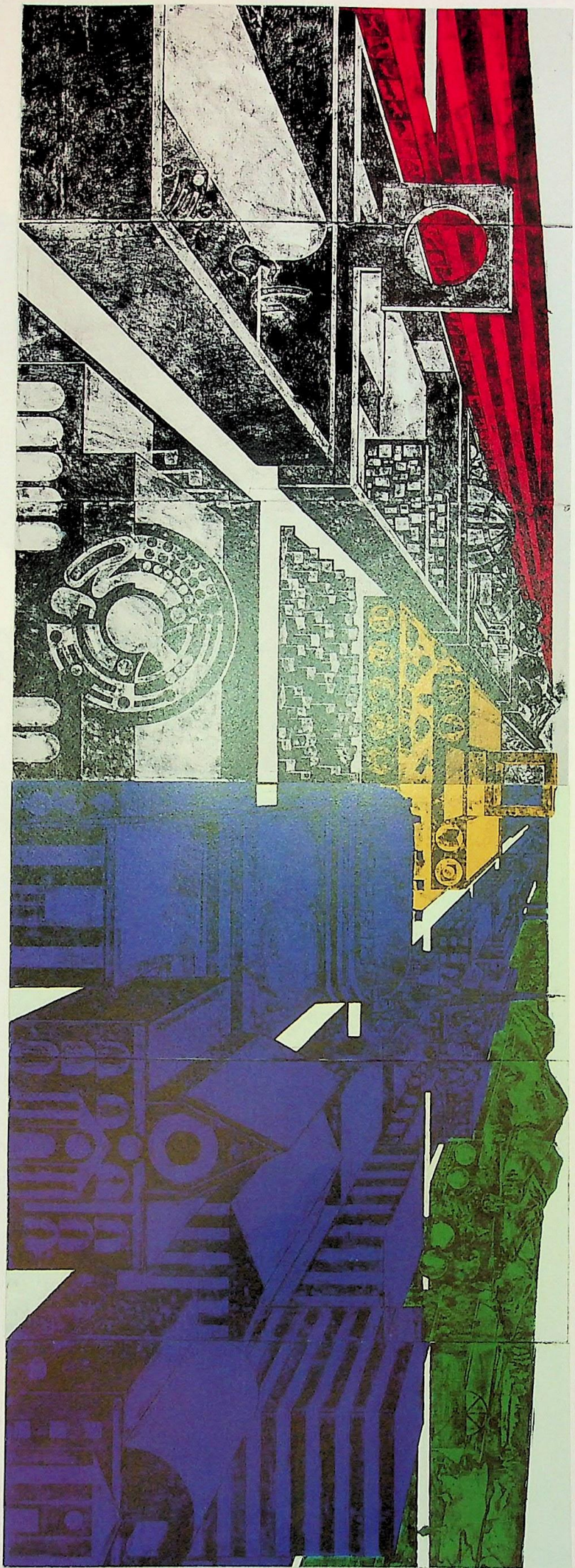
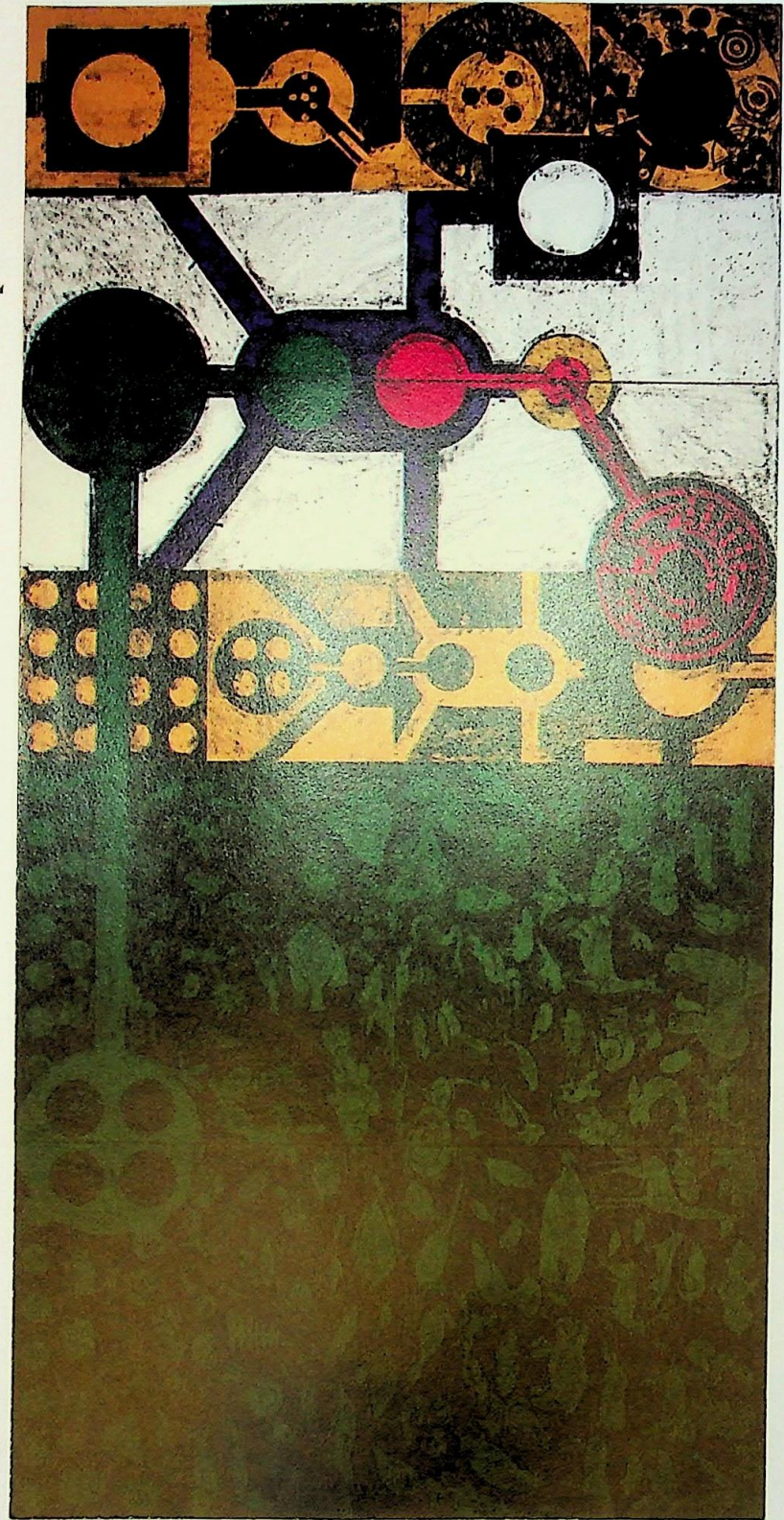
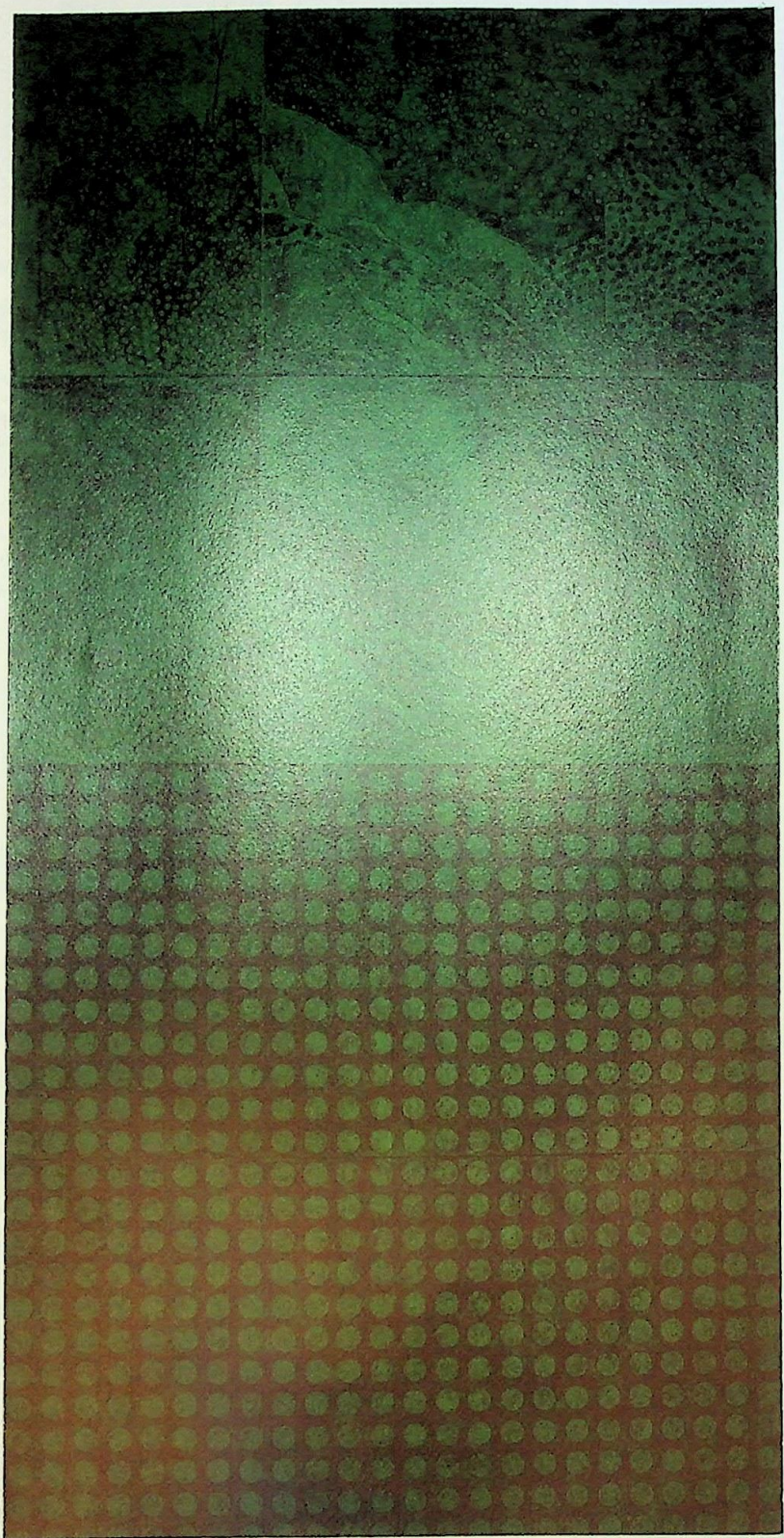
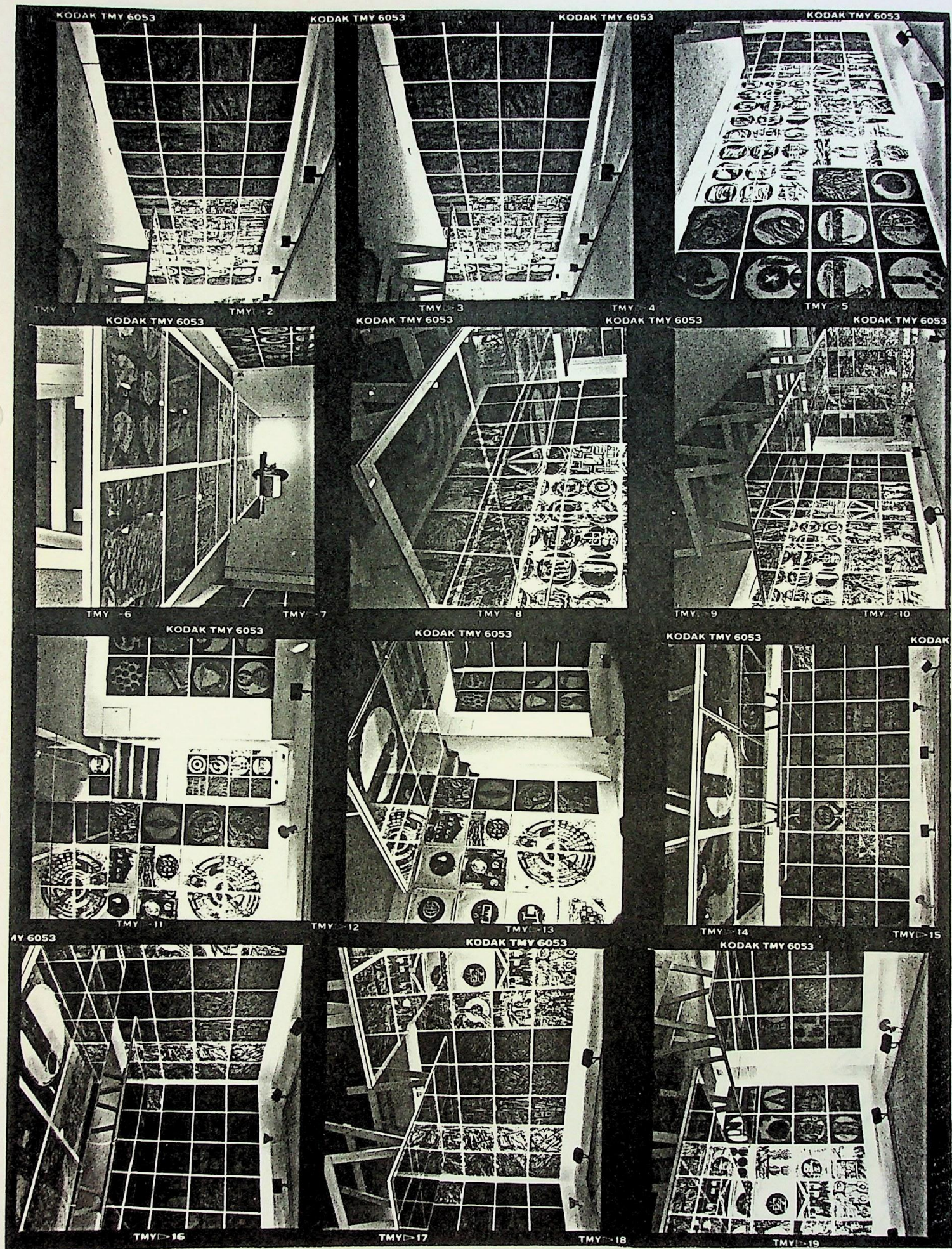


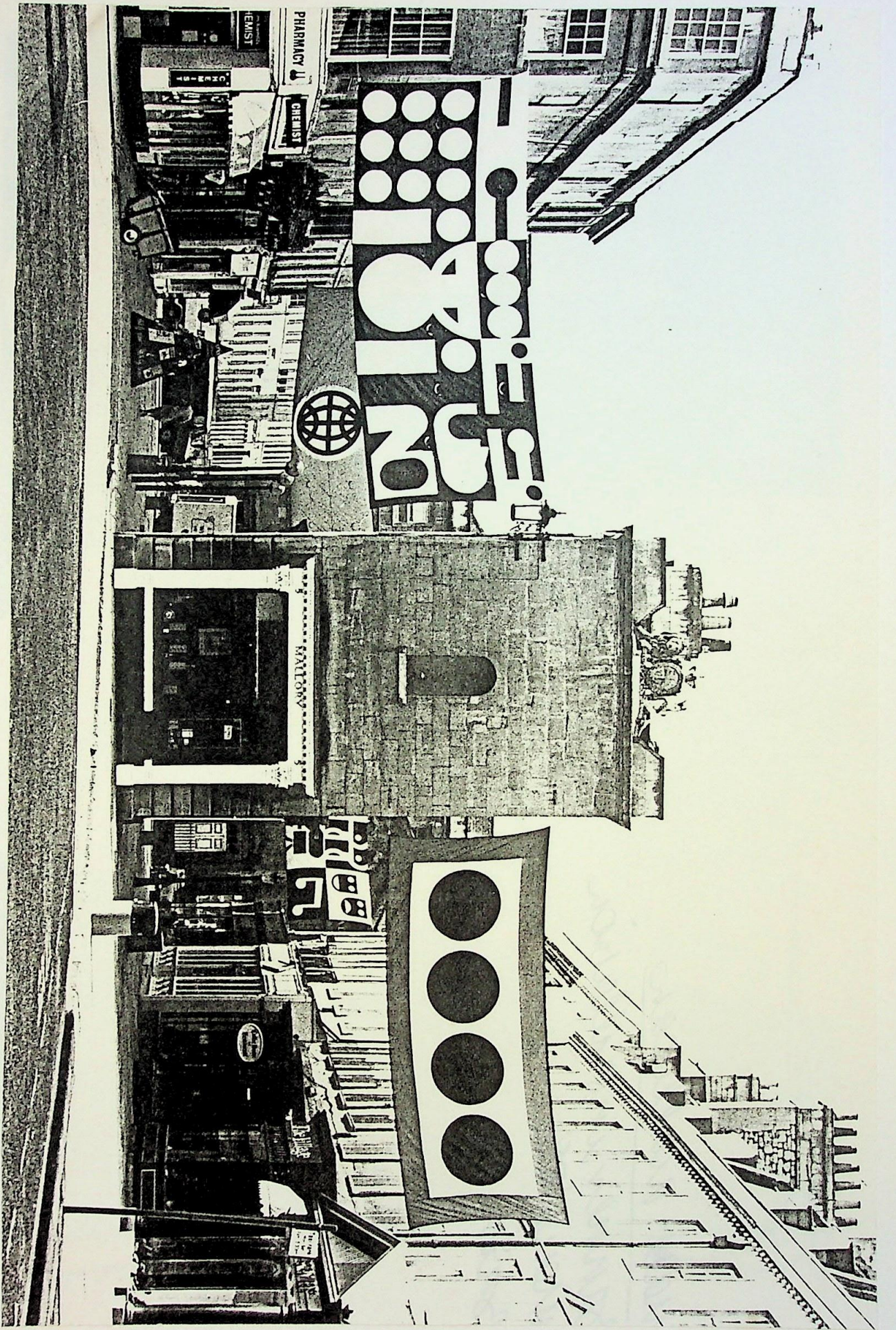
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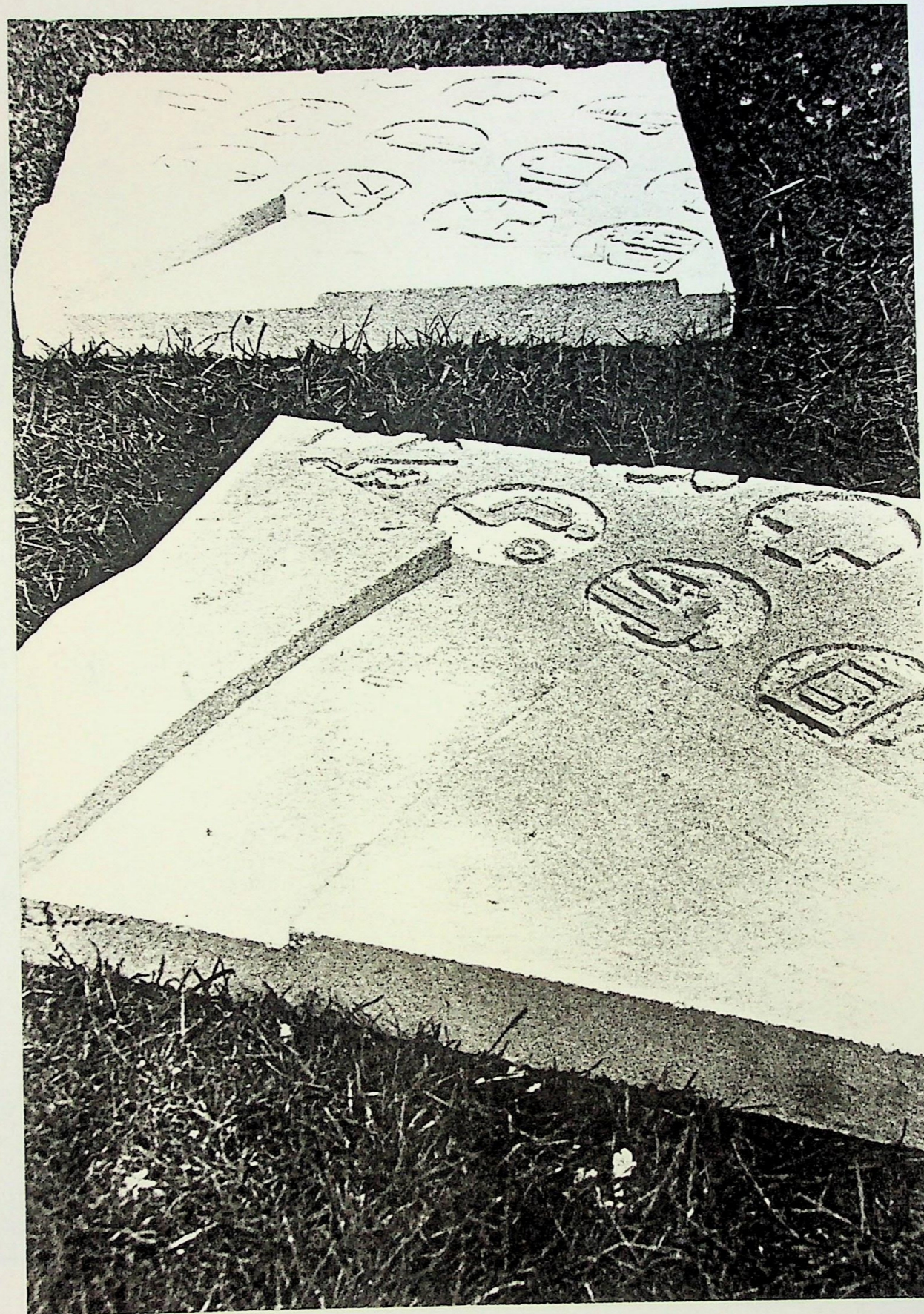


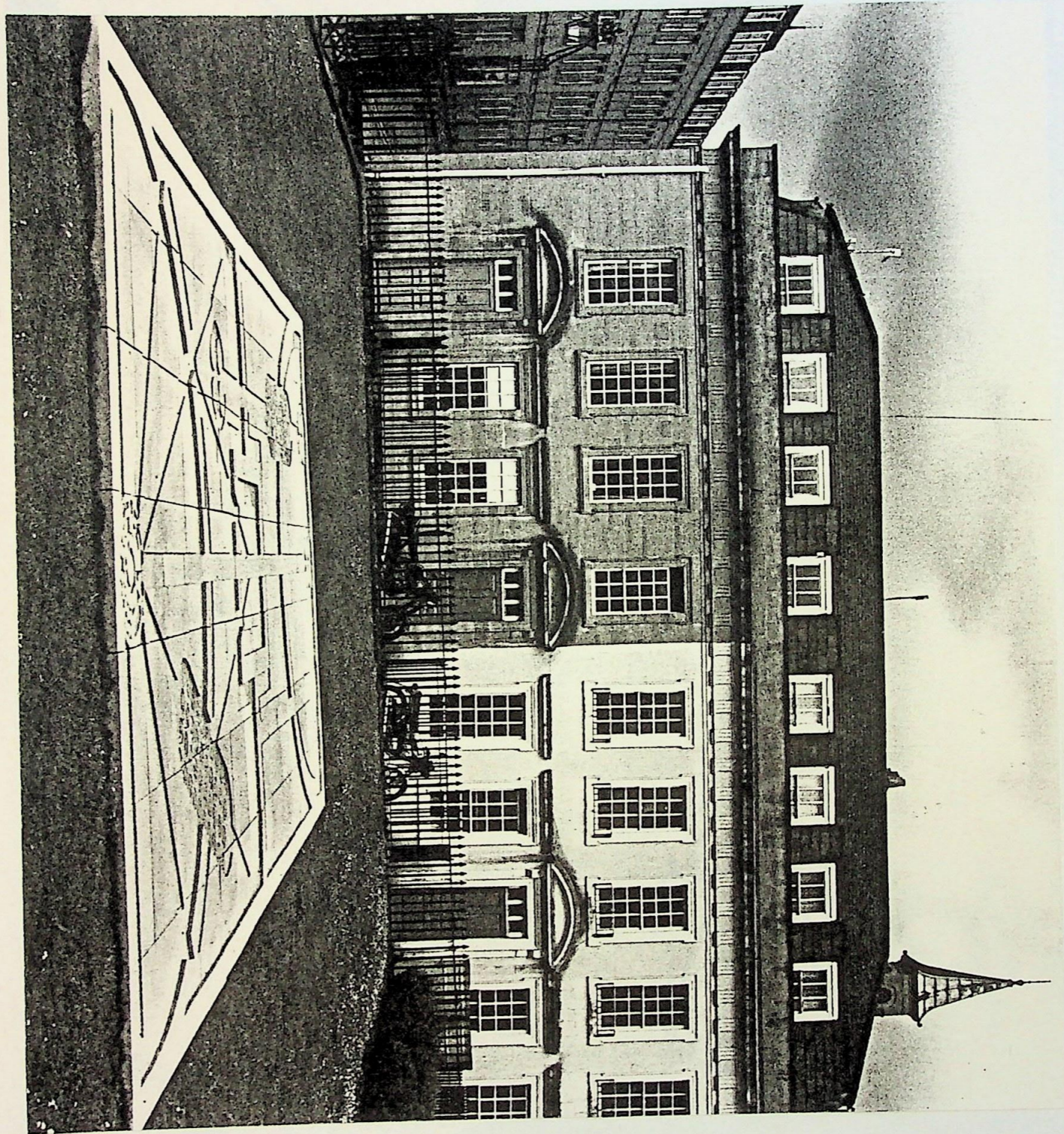


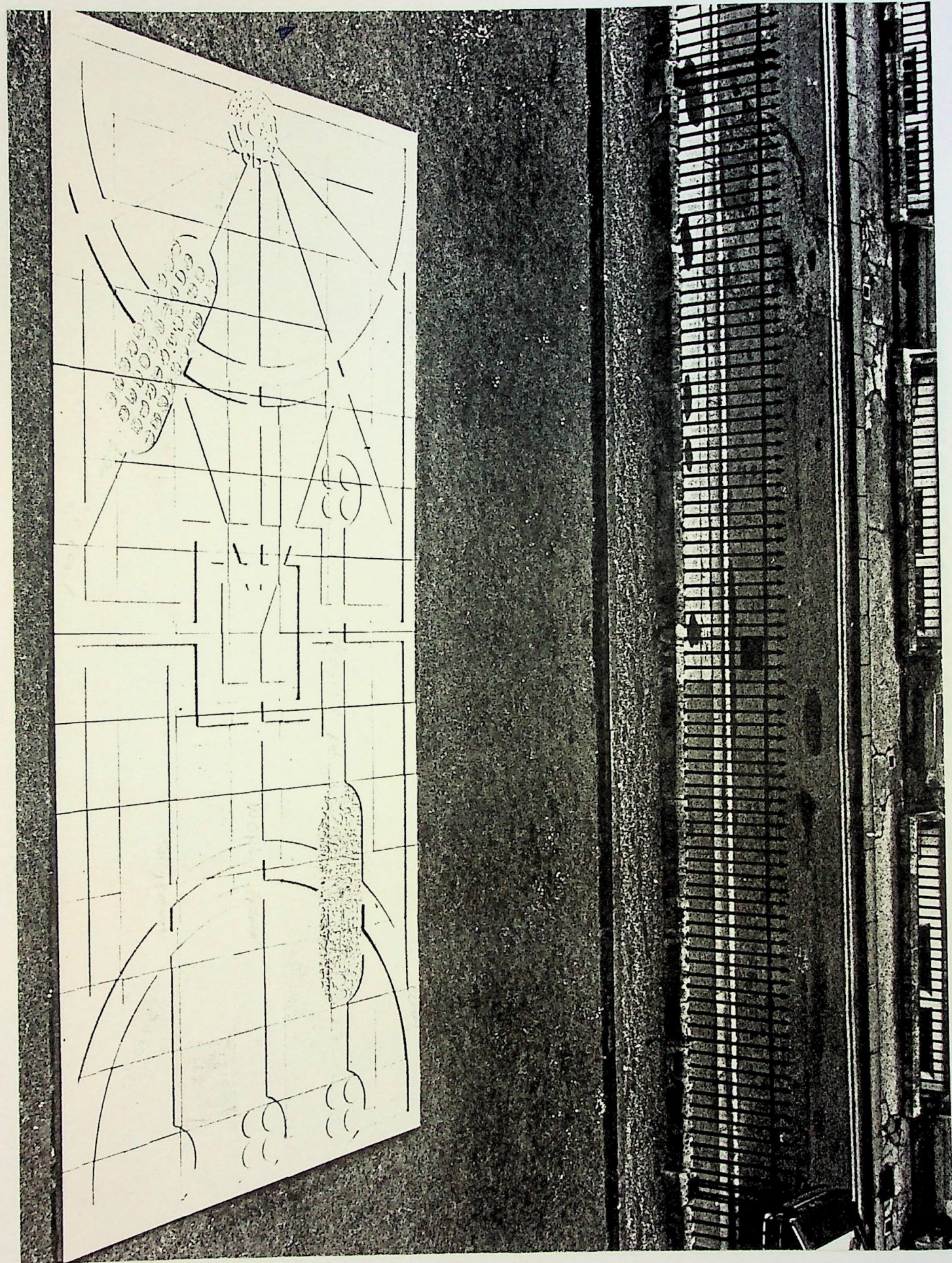




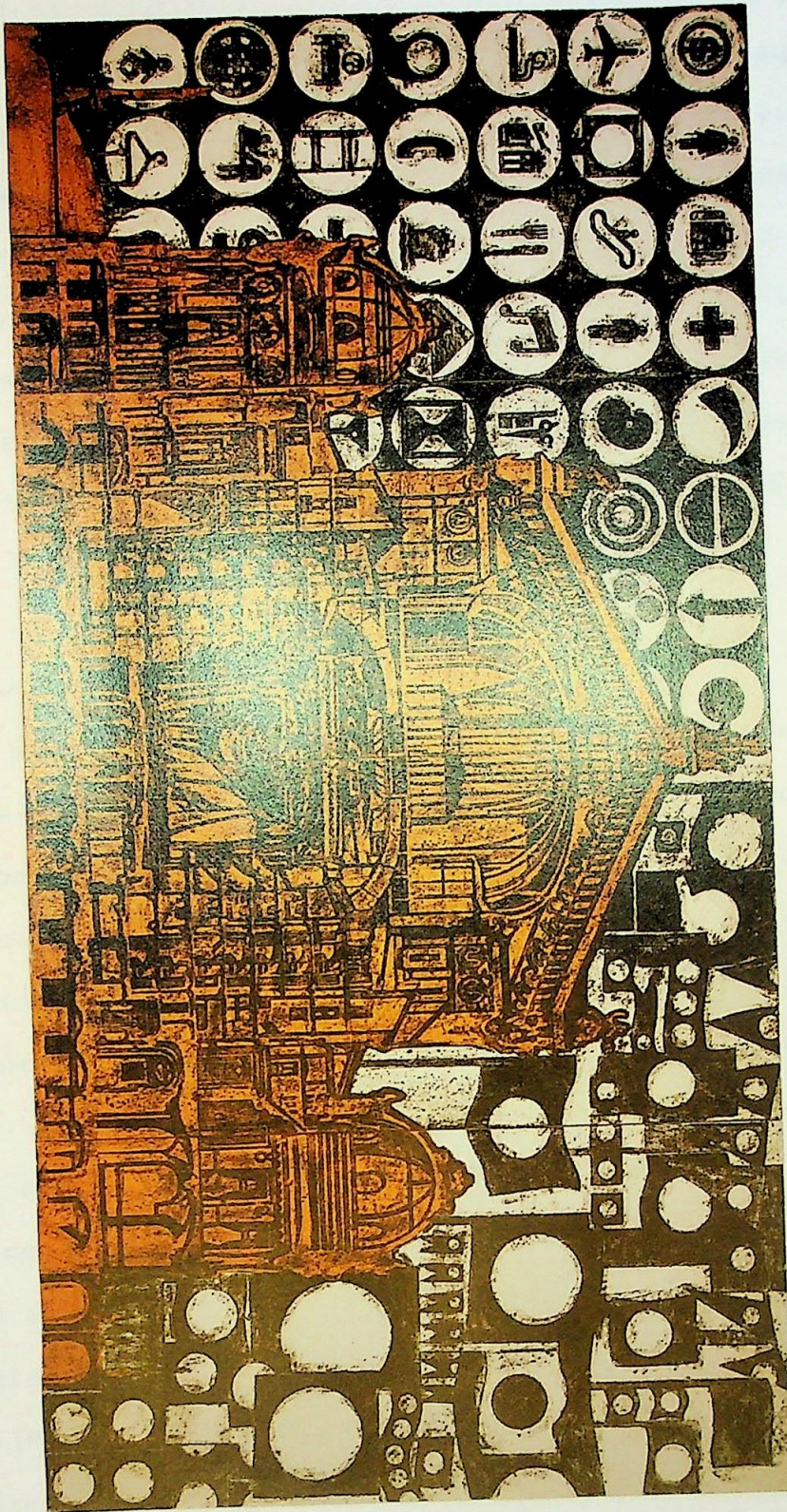












INTRODUCTION

Mullican seeks to structure the universe, to construct its origins, processes and structures through classification. He plots like a poet and a philosopher. His invented universal language does not deny its subjective nature nor its maker's personality. He is a model maker who creates worlds governed by an irrational but mappable scheme, an intricate network of material and spiritual sympathies. His vocabulary is at once simplistic and hermetically complex. In how many ways do we break up our world so that its sense, its logic might be grasped? "Mullican's art encourages us to question frameworks, to wonder about the nature of super structures, master plans". (1)

Since the early 70's Mullican has immersed himself in a personal language of signs, symbols and abstract forms. He grew up during the 60's and was powerfully aware of Pop Art: art composed of media orientated popular imagery, the emblems and logos of modern life. He spent his college years in Cal Arts in Valencia, California, a school well known for its emphasis on art as idea. Thus Mullican's mature work has a personal iconography and pictographic language.

Informative material on Mullican seemed quite scarce at first, but after writing to Galleries and sifting through magazines, it soon added up to a substantial amount. Mullican's gallery dealers, Michael Klein Inc. (New York), sent some up to date catalogues and articles. The Artiste Gallery in Bath also sent useful articles and documentation on his show there last year.

"Matt Mullican is one of the most interesting of the younger generation of emergent American Artists". (2) He is a well established young artist in the United States and has had some solo and group shows in Europe. However, he had his first show in Britain at the 1988 Bath Festival. The exhibition utilised both the Gallery and the City of Bath itself. He has not yet exhibited in Ireland but there is a possibility that he may be having a show in the Orchard Gallery, Derry in 1989.

Mullican's art is very much to do with a structure. Studying structural theories aligns him with the philosopher: a philosophical, poetical, visual artist. His art cannot be associated with any particular artistic group or style. His art defies easy categorisation.

A work entitled 'Bulletin Board' (Pl. 1) in many ways epitomises his output: it is like a private collection of his things made public. He awards the Bulletin Board from home and office a public venue. His own arrangement on the board is similar to the private organisation and collecting that we all make in our daily lives. One photograph push pinned onto the 'Bulletin Board' shows a boy's room with a similar board on the wall. The walls are layered with shelves, lined with books, relics, bones and other archaeological objects. Maps are tacked onto the shelves, charts to the walls. Banners and pennants with logos and emblems hang above his bed. The boy is sitting at his desk experimenting with his chemistry set, mixing substances that react, change colour and smell; a child who

delights in collecting, teaming, dividing and subdividing everything into categories. He comes to believe that all the pieces of his world have a place in some overall scheme.

Perhaps Mullican spotted this photograph in a magazine and thought it relevant as he may at heart still be "this sort of child".(3)

Mullican is an artist who continually compiles and classifies information. In all of Mullican's work, whether in the form of posters, rubbings, granite slabs, performances, tapestries, stained glass or bulletin boards, each work is but one piece in a complex puzzle.

Introduction Footnotes

1. Douglas Blau, Matt Mullican at Mary Bonne, Art in America (March 1983) p. 153.
2. MULLICAN catalogue, Artiste Gallery, Bath, 1988. p. 3.
3. Douglas Blau, p. 152.

CHAPTER I

Mullican's Performances

Mullican is best known for his charts, posters, banners, stained glass pieces and etched granite slabs, all of which feature signs derived from our universally coded pictographs encountered daily in streets, restaurants, airports and other public places. His flat, slick, crisp signs seem to slide into our consciousness with the ease of their pictographic models. One soon realizes that Mullican has tampered with the form and/or meaning that temporarily throws the viewer off balance. His performances encapsulate this concept of dualism that operates in all his work - dualisms that are inherent in the make up of the human body and mind, but are commonly repressed in a drive for simplicity and control. Mullican disallows this repression in his art, most definitely in his performances.

He graduated from the California Institute of the Arts in 1973. Since then he has produced an average of one performance a year. His cosmology consists of fabricated signs that are drawn from concepts like Before Birth, Death/Life, Heaven/Hell. Sometimes these concepts were initially acted out in simple live performances. For example, he once positioned one person on a table and another underneath on the floor, to illustrate the hierarchical order of Heaven and Hell.

His performances date back to High School, where he conducted spontaneous happenings and games. In Art School he experimented in

live format with his peer group who included two artists, David Salle and James Welling. The central performance in Mullican's mature work was in 1975. His material was a dead body. The event took place in a medical school where a friend of his was assigned a cadaver for anatomical research. There was no audience, just the friend who took the photograph. The scene sounds rather gruesome, but according to Mullican, was not. "There was a sort of purity in the fact of deadness".(1) Mullican sequentially covered the cadaver's ears, eyes, nose, held the head, put his finger into the mouth, pinched the arm, slapped the face and blew the hair on the back of its neck. Mullican discovered that he kept referring to the corpse as both 'it' and 'him'. Although it was a fact that the body was dead, he felt uncomfortable slapping 'its' face. He realised that his action signified an attempt to either awaken 'him' or 'insult' him. This body was both an 'it' and a 'him', an object and a subject. Simultaneously devoid of meaning and of great significance, an oxymoronic state of being.

He included several of these photographs that documented the medical school piece in one of his 'Bulletin Boards'. (Pl. 1). A photograph of Mullican blowing 'its' hair, metaphorically awakening the cadaver by equating movement with life. The cadaver's already dissected abdominal region emphasising 'its' objecthood. Finally, the cadaver's full face with closed eyes was juxtaposed with photographs of two wide-eyed dolls. Allan McCollum comments on this comparison in one of his articles. He feels it poses the philosophical question "Is a dead body more 'dead' than 'dead' matter? ...Is a living

functional person more alive than a real dead one?" (2). It begins to dawn on us that neither the doll nor the cadaver may be described as more dead or alive than the other. What we are left with is an intensively provocative pair of concepts 'Life' and 'Death' which should describe the opposition depicted, but can't. The work hovers between what is and what is not. The in-between space between a thing and the thing itself. This dualism also exists in his poster series. (Pl. 2). The signs that represent 'Life' and 'Death' are exact opposites of each other. According to Mullican, sign are arbitrary and the opposition signified by the same basic sign is very slim.

In order to contact an inner world of psychic images that suggest a private vision, Mullican has invented symbols under hypnosis. Since 1978 he has allowed himself to be hypnotised many times. He deliberately allows himself to travel a universe in which images are free of category. Oppositions become intermingled, the true and the false, the imaginary and physical, and the familiar and unconscious. "Under hypnosis you're a schizophrenic ... I was 27 years old and I was 4 years old".(3) His experiences range from early childhood to physically feeling the breakdown of the body. At the same time Mullican is fully aware of his present age. One of the principles of hypnosis is that one becomes the dreamy observer of ones own actions: the experience of the self as both subject and object.

In one particular performance, the audience were taken along this fantastic journey 'through' the image of a large hourglass drawing.

The artist turning back and forth from the work in progress to the audience, with explanatory text. He describes the fantasy of being sucked into ones own body, getting claustrophobically smaller. It is difficult not to be pulled along this journey. Simultaneously the viewer experiences the human body as a self-contained subject and an object open to examination.

In another performance 'The List', (Pl. 3) he sits with his back to the audience, right up against the stage wall, his nose nearly touching a very long sheet of text, 'The List' pinned up in front of him. He reads aloud a list of short sentences, fragments that comprise a narrative of an individual's life. It starts from 'her' birth to 'her' death. Experiences ranging from the most banal to the very emotional. The audience is aware of being drawn into this characters life, where poverty and old age are interchangeable. 'The List' is both specific and general, the identity of the subject keeps changing. 'She' could be any one of us. Again this work shows Mullican's continual exploration between opposites.

In another performance (not under hypnosis) he brings the audience on another fantasy journey, this time into a Piranesi print of a ruined arch, bringing us through the frame of the picture, through the arch into a deep space. Once in that space he described the smells etc. of the mountain area. Near the end of the journey a colleague set fire to the picture (which was pre-arranged) and Mullican 'ran out' of the picture frame. He demonstrated a possible intersection between two seemingly separate areas. The imaginary world and the

real world. Although Mullican was in a fantasy world he never fully departed from an anxious awareness of his body in the real world. He ran out of the imaginary world to protect his body that only exists in the real world. Mullican emphasises a dualism that exists in ones own physical make up. Our body exists within a world of complicated and conflicting meanings. In sociologist Brian Turner's terms "Each of us both has and is a body, it is both sovereign and subordinate, a natural environment and one constituted in society".(4)

In Jacque Lacan's theory of the human subject he summarises "All notions of absolute autonomy and unity are swept aside as mere illusions".(5) He formulated this theory from observing infants perceiving their own reflection in a mirror, 'The Mirror Stage'. The child becomes aware of his or her own physical totality for the first time, as a total whole. Lacan points out the difference between the child's objective state of fragmentation and insufficiency and the illusory feeling of autonomy and unity from her image in the mirror.

Mullican emphasizes the dualisms that exist within our physical make up. To repress these opposites that co-exist in a drive for wholeness and unity is an illusion. It is worth noting here that many critics often blur the dualism operating within Mullican's work. He is seen as developing subjective means to tap into a 'universal meaning' or into codes of the 'collective unconscious'. Such assessments are partially correct but elude what is so fundamental to the work - 'the slippery opposites'.(6) Germano Celant describes Mullican's work as studded with symbols that are archetypal in the 'collective unconscious'.(7)

Mullican's final performance at Artiste Space in 1985 summarises the core concerns in Mullican's work. (Pl. 4). He placed small pieces of bone from a small cardboard box onto a plain white table. The pieces of bone if placed together correctly would make up a complete human skeleton. When in the cardboard box they were but a heap of junk. When randomly placed on the white table they became a spellbinding bone puzzle. The bones are simultaneously worthless and precious, objects and subjects. Kathy O'Dell in her article summarises his primary concerns. "Semiotic flexibility, the independence of fantasy and anxiety, the oxymoronic status of the body".(8)

CHAPTER I - FOOTNOTES

1. Kathy O'Dell "Through the Maze", Art In America (January 1988) P. 116.
2. Allan McCollum "Matt Mullican's World", Real Life Magazine, (Winter 1980) P. 13.
3. Kathy O'Dell, P. 18.
4. Bryan S. Turner, "The Body and Society", Explorations in Social Theory, Oxford. Basil Blackwell, 1984. PP. 7-8.
5. The Works of Jacques Lacan. "An Introduction", by Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy. P. 20.
6. Kathy O'Dell, P. 119.
7. Germano Celant, "Between Atlas and Sisyphus", Artforum, (November 1985). P. 77.
8. Kathy O'Dell, P. 121.

STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Mullican works within frameworks similar to an anthropologist. The notion of a 'model' is in the minds of both. "The term social structure has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it".(1) He conceives anthropology in its broadest sense by combining a close range view with a systematic generalising. His approach is integrated and holistic; supposedly applicable to all societies and valid for all observers. A model is created by combining theory and experience. Structure exists in "all societies and all cultures, crystals, machines, in fact everything that is not wholly amorphous has a structure".(2)

Historico-geographical concerns are paramount. Levi Strauss is known as a structural anthropologist, Mullican could be called a structural artist. "Everything that I do is based on the idea of a model".³ People often feel a gap between his model and the actual world. He has often been asked does he believe the cosmology that he represents? He does not necessarily believe in the cosmology but in the notion of it. The work builds up layer upon layer from an inverted ideal, rather than reality. He has escaped the scientific restrictions of having to be right or wrong through his artistic license. A philosopher is not necessarily 'right' but the model is the real world. Mullican, using the real world as material and inspiration, has invented his own imaginary one. He can invert,

distort, exaggerate, include and exclude whatever he chooses. He gives people the opportunity to observe or step into his world. It is possible to explore his world in far greater depth than the real world.

Mullican's process is similar to the anthropologist except that he builds up his model from his invented world rather than an empirical reality. Many critics have compared him with artists and philosophers who attempt to bring order and structure to the concept of the universe. Mysticism, alchemy, rational and empirical enquiry and above all, organised religion. Each has its own set of codes and signs in order to classify knowledge into hierarchies and strict categories. "By creating his own system of cosmological symbolism Mullican tries to catalogue the entire spectrum of knowledge". (4) For Mullican the imagination and symbol are treated the same. "The breakdown of the real world into the symbolic world has to do with art". (5) Mullican's world is a fairy tale, an imaginary one.

A STRUCTURAL ARTIST

Mullican could be viewed as a philosopher as well as an impassioned collector of signs. He is constantly on the look out for new signs to add to his collection, to impose some kind of symbolic order to our incomprehensible reality. He orders the most varied signs and symbols into a self sufficient cosmological system, "He accommodates the whole of life into one system in which gods, demi-gods, devils

and people all have their fixed place".(6) One big difference between the philosopher and Mullican is that the philosopher works from the real world, whereas Mullican works from an invented world. He claims no particular literary source but it may throw some light on the subject if we examine some theories of linguistics.

"The only reason I'm able to go through the subjective is because I have a structure by which to survive ..[otherwise]...signs start to clash and you can go nuts".(7)

Structure exists everywhere at once, it can be found in nature, culture, art and science. Everything that is not by its nature indivisible can be shown to have a structure. Structuralism, unlike structure is a local phenomenon that has developed in a small number of intellectual disciplines, most influentially in linguistics and anthropology. It exists either in 'soft' sciences or as in the case of literary studies, Humanities. Mathematics would not exist without structures whereas structuralist thinkers had to impose it on their field, as it was only one method of enquiry.

Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan are but a few who were involved in the structuralist movement. Levi Strauss was a particularly active member right up to the mid 1980's. Within the movement there were moderate followers and extremists. Structuralist linguists claim that languages underlying system is universal just as our numeral mathematical system is said to be. "Structuralism will seem like a genuine

opportunity to unify as never before our seriously fragmented understanding of the world around us".(8) Beneath superficial variety or diversity of many forms there is an underlying structure. This helps bring about a removal of boundaries between academic disciplines.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics said "Speech has both an individual and a social side and we cannot conceive of one without the other".(9) Language belongs both to the individual and society, therefore we cannot discover its unity. It belongs both to an established system and evolution. Belonging to an existing institution and a product of the past. The system and history are hard to separate. Language is a convention, speech is not natural to mankind, what is natural is the ability to construct it. "The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name but a concept and a sound image".(10) It is a double entity formed by associating two terms.

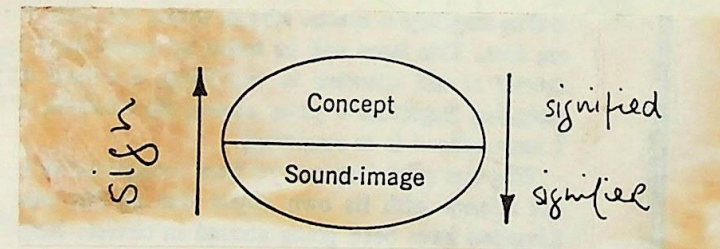


Fig. 1.

A linguistic sign is the combination of the concept and the sound image (Fig. 1). The sound image 'arbour' is called a sign only because it carries the concept of 'tree'. The signified and the

signifier make the sign. This bond between the two is arbitrary. The symbol is not so arbitrary as the bond is visible. There is a visual relationship between the signified and the signifier. There is a clear link between the concept and the expression. The sound image which is also the signifier has an unclear link with the concept, there seems to be no natural connection. Its connection has been constructed.

The concept 'Target' and the image for 'Target' have a natural bond. In Mullican's poster series the artist's name appears above the pictograph 'Hell' and the sign meaning 'Heaven' is given below. (Pl.2). Reading the poster it has no logical narrative. He wishes to reveal the ambiguity within language.

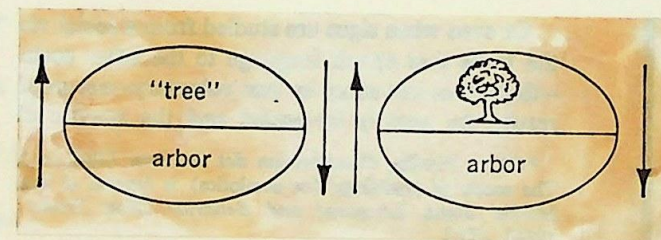


Fig. 2.

When Saussure's drawing (Fig. 2) is compared with Mullican's poster, it is possible to understand what Mullican might be getting at. In neither drawing do the signifier and the signified have a clear connection, emphasizing impermanence and arbitrariness within signs. A 'Target' can signify the question as to whether we can be manipulated through signs and symbols. "While it is easy to

recognise the prominence of signs in our everyday experience, the proliferation of signs and of whole systems of signs that tell us what to do or who we are, are largely unannounced features of urban life today". (11) Institutional signs are like a 'secret language' in which to influence the thoughts and actions of the general public. Due to signs impermanent and arbitrary structure, its devices, if tapped into, can be used to manipulate.

In another two posters the image for Life and Death are both similar and different. (Pl. 2). He uses the conventional sign for the subject (the letter I) to represent both Life and Death. The only difference is that Life is a black image on a white background and Death is vice versa. Black is a colour western culture associates with death and darkness and white with life and light. The opposition between life and death which is signified by the same sign becomes very slim.

Mullican's clear images and unmodulated colour are similar to commercial signs in our media-influenced environment. The commercial sign signals a fixed message. At first viewing his posters appear very much the same but upon extended viewing the concept/image does not correspond with the sound/image. His arbitrary meaning allows the viewer to produce his/her own meaning. His posters reveal that authoritarian images and what they signify are in fact constructed.

POST STRUCTURALISM

Jacques Derrida was the creator of post-structuralism almost single-handed. He saw many inconsistencies with structuralist theories. "They are to dismantle the whole system of Western thought since the time of Plato".(12) Saussure believed that language did not create meaning but simply revealed it, implying that meaning pre-exists its expression. Derrida criticised Saussure as being idealistic. He believed that there is no meaning that is not formulated. It is constructed as a system through a trace of signs. Speech, writing and thought are all forms of this system. "A sign which took place only once would not be a sign. In their possibility of their repetition lies the identity of signs".(13) When we speak or think we still have to recourse to signs. We are not fully present without using a system of signs, that is not ours alone but a social institution. "We are alienated even from ourselves through language".(14)

If we are alienated from ourselves how can we possibly communicate? All texts are potentially 'dead' the moment they are written. Every interpretation of a text holds a new meaning. Meanings will coincide depending how far author and reader are in time, space and culture. No concept of 'mastery' is possible, an uncertainty always remains. Both Derrida and Barthes believed that a text contained multiple meanings. Structures have no centres, these systems are in constant play, which is a realisation unpopular to many who crave 'centres'

and 'essences'. Readers can vary from extremely passive to hyperactive. Within that, multiple meanings are unavoidable. A poet writes to provoke a 'text' on those who have read them whereas a prose writer is more possessive of meaning. Critics carry on from where the author leaves off and the reader continues on from the critic. Meaning is not static but an on-going process.

A post structuralist thinker would call a 'book' a 'text'. A book is enclosed between two covers and is therefore indicating a complete entity. A text is not enclosed, it indicates an openendedness. It does not have the unity of the 'book'. Steve Willats writes an article on his exhibition 'Signs and Images from Corporate America 1988'. "A characteristic of this quietly spreading network of institutionally originated signs is their inherent reductiveness on the basic representation of complex reality".(15) People in power have a tendency to simplify and unify meaning that is in reality highly complex. This creates a distance between the message maker and receiver. Mullican's stark, graphic signs are similar to the pictographs encountered daily in streets, airports and other public places. Opposites co-exist in the unsettled, unsettling fashion of everything Mullican produces, dualisms that are inherent in the make up of the human body and mind but are commonly repressed in a drive for simplicity and control. Mullican disallows this repression, shortening the distance between 'the message maker and receiver'.(16) Although Mullican's work features signs derived from our universally coded pictographs he has tampered with the form and/or meaning.

The place of the author becomes the 'subject'. A text by Barthes 'Death of an Author' implies an end to authenticity; ridding us of our belief that authors can transfer their life into literature without loss or distortion. This belief is in itself a construction, a hypothesis. All we have of the authors are signs not selves. An authoritative figure, an author, is thought to write true meaning. A subject sounds less authoritative and therefore indicates an ambiguity.

It is interesting here to refer to Mullican's poster series. (Pl. 2) The twelve posters are arranged in two lines of six. In each the artists name appears above a pictographic sign. The sign's meaning is given below. They are as follows: Hell/Heaven, Before Birth, God, Death/Life, Elements, subjective, Demon Angel and The World.

The first poster features a simple signpost with a hole in it pictured inside a larger version of itself. This symbol implies a 'sign', the task to be engaged in the poster series is to read them, to distinguish the meaning. This invitation is furthered by the posters lined on the wall, like a sentence. Yet there is no logical narrative when reading the posters in sequence. Mullican has constructed very unexpected juxtapositions within a method that we normally find very rationally predictable. Mullican the artist 'creator' is not out to make sense. Mullican's role is not that of 'God' or 'Author' but as a mediator within a jumble of incoherent, ambiguous, arbitrary meanings.

Derrida dismisses the notion of 'truth' when interpreting a text. Interpretation is perpetually open to new critical discoveries. An overall truth would bring interpretation to a 'stop'. There is no escape from the shifting play of meanings. We are continually in a "state of suspended ignorance".(17) Derrida uses the old metaphorical opposition between the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of textual meaning and relates it to the *age old* opposition of body and soul. According to Derrida, the human soul as a spiritual essence comes about through Western misunderstanding of language. The soul, like god or any other transcendental signified, is just one more signifier. They are not outside the play of language but within it. Post structuralists say that we are in command of what we say or write but that we should be conscious that every sign we employ is socially not personally authorised. If we as individuals are just part of a system, it is harder to see the individual as a superior element. This ideology is what most of us are led to believe. By returning to systems and institutions, structuralism restores a balance that has been lost. The agent is within a system and must function by its rules. The scope of the individual is extremely limited but inflated in the popular imagination. Barthes and Derrida are quite mild in their antisubjectivism compared to Levi Strauss. To Levi Strauss, structure is a primordial fact. "There would be structure in nature it seems even if there were no human beings on earth to discover and formalise it".(18) He shows total disgust towards human self-centredness.

Mullican works within a structure, otherwise "signs start to clash and you go nuts".(19) As Derrida says, the agent is within a system and must function within its rules. Mullican has constructed his own rules and within them his work can function as art. Some of the structuralist's basic principles can be compared with Mullican's ideologies. Many people have criticised his work as being too obscure and arbitrary. How clear or understandable is a lot of what we experience? Derrida discusses the problems when interpreting a text. The same must exist when interpreting an artist's work. There are so many different possibilities. His method of working is openended and on-going. There is no such notion of truth, then all creativity would stop. "His installation is, after all, art, not a semblance of truth".(20) According to post structuralist theory, any truth is yet another constructed sign, there is no essence.

CHAPTER II - FOOTNOTES

STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Claude Levi Strauss, Structural Anthropology, P. 279.
2. Kroeber Structural Anthropology, P. 278.
3. MULLICAN, Artiste Gallery, Bath, "World Within Worlds", A conversation with Matt Mullican by Dan Cameron, 1988. P.7.
4. Colin Gardner. Establishing Order(s). Artweek (October 19 1988) P.3.
5. MULLICAN, P.5

A STRUCTURAL ARTIST

6. Paul Groot. Matt Mullican, Parkett, 17, 1988. P.96.
7. MULLICAN P.7
8. John Sturrock. Structuralism Introduction P.VII.
9. Ferdinand de Saussure, "Course in General Linguistics" P.60
10. Ferdinand de Saussure, P.70.
11. Stephen Willats, "Signs and Messages from Corporate America" Art Monthly, (Dec/Jan 1988/9). P.14.

POST STRUCTURALISM

12. Jacques Derrida, Structuralism, by John Sturrock, P.137.
13. IBID.
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15. Stephen Willats.
16. IBID.
17. Paul de Ma, Structuralism by John Sturrock. P.159.
18. Levi Strauss, Post Structuralism, Structuralism. P.169.
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20. Donald Kuspit, Review, Artforum, (November 1988) P.140.

CHAPTER III

MULLICAN'S SYMBOLISM

The definition of a symbol from Collins English Dictionary: SYMBOL (simb'1) N. 1. sign, 2. thing representing or typifying something - symbolic a. - symbolically adv. - symbolism n.

1. Use of, representation by symbol.
2. Movement in art holding that works of art should express idea in symbolic form - symbolist n./a. - symbolic. (1)

Mullican seeks to structure the universe, to construct its origins, processes and structure through classification. He has created his own vocabulary of images to represent his highly individual vision of the world - images based on the public language of signs and symbols. The style of his emblems, as well as certain specific images are derived from international symbols used on signs in airports and highways. "Symbols are part of the landscape. Every airport, every railroad station has these things and I am interested in the manner in which people express themselves unconsciously as a culture". (2) (Plate 5.)

He charts a uniquely systematic cosmology where such metaphysical intangibles as Life/Death, Heaven/Hell, Fate and God are reduced to form an archetypal visual language. Mullican's conceptual iconography can be closely related to Jacques Lacan's findings that

the symbol is the mediator between the conscious and the unconscious. Ferdinand de Saussure has said that the symbol is the least arbitrary of signs. There is a connection between the concept and the symbol whereas this connection is more arbitrary between the concept and the sound image. (3)

Mullican's symbols include iconographic elements from non Western traditions either extinct or on the point of extinction, along with newer icons of more contemporary communication. The symbols evoke what is contained in the human and what is above or outside him. There are symbols drawn from medieval times to the present. Both of Mullican's parents are artists and personally collect a variety of ancient and ethnographic art, including art from Oceania, Egypt and Greece. This must have been an early influence on his eclectic approach to images. Mullican's cosmology contains primordial images, historical and biological, elemental and personal from the worlds of both God and man. Symbolic power can emerge from the individual's personal unconscious or from the collective mind in the exploration of archetypes, emblems and memories. "Mullican set up an osmosis between the two possibilities". (4)

He has invented a cosmological system which he is very much part of. Latent iconographic systems along with his individual signature become the foundation of a collective essence. Germano Celant aligns Mullican's work to what the far Eastern traditions and American Indian tribes seek and possess. "Symbols are the mirror of a greater reality". (5)

Donald Kuspit has contrary beliefs to Celant. He does not think that Mullican's symbols represent reality but are a kind of "intellectual shell of it".(6) Mullican denies metaphysical status to his symbols or that any symbol making reflects a greater reality. His symbolic scheme is in fact an incomplete index of things. "Creating a kind of Potemkin's village of symbols behind which there is no reality".(7)

Overall the symbols are inconclusive and cause a peculiar strain on intelligibility. Nothing is as simple as it at first seems to be. Imagination and symbolisation become one, which is at the core of his art.

MULLICAN'S COLOUR CODE

Mullican uses colour to enrich the power of his symbols. He has used a colour code since around 1980, a code that is neither wholly ideosyncratic nor self-evident.

"Mullican's pictographs occupy the cusp between resemblance and opacity".(8)

White and black which are on the outer edges of the colour spectrum signify dichotomies like positive/negative, life/death and heaven/hell, hinges between the visible and the invisible. Mysterious states where energy is born and dies. Mullican, in his poster series uses the letter 'I', the most conventional sign, for the subjective to represent life and death. (Pl. 2). It represents

'Life' when pictured as a black image on a poster of white. It represents 'Death' when the white image is on a black poster. These temporal differences between life and death are exemplified through black and white colours. Black and white also stand for the world of 'language and signs', the rational network of definitions and information. Mullican originally only used black and white and occasionally red. Since then he has expanded his colour code. His five colours correspond to his five divisions of the universe.

YELLOW 'The World Framed. That is the world of art. (Mullican believes that art is as natural a phenomenon as any other natural, living part of the world).

GREEN 'The Elemental World'. It signifies the four elements and all of nature. In alchemy green signifies the mediator between upper and lower, animal and divine, human and vegetable.

BLUE 'The World Unframed' encompasses the mundane, open, unregulated, everyday world around us.

RED 'The Subjective World'. As close as Mullican comes to a notion of spirituality.

In an early performance piece red signified Hell, and it is now the colour of the subjective self. His colour code is by no means a utopian vision but is edgy with psychological quirks.

MULLICAN'S USE OF COLOUR AND SYMBOLS

Mullican's paintings are actually rubbings. Black oilstick rubbed over flat, bright acrylic colour. His pictures have a subtle, worn surface in contrast with the sharp, clear, crispness of the actual symbol system to which he refers. This effect prevents us from seeing the images as 'real'. It forces us to examine the notion of meaning. Meaning, even such grand meaning as this is in fact constructed. Rather than taking a judgemental stance towards our mental respect to the 'universal' symbols, he acknowledges and exploits the tendency. His pictographs are targeted towards our most early and most basic urge to understand. According to Lacan this phase precedes the emergence of the self.

"It is only later that the subject has to recognise himself as ... he who counts". (9)

We will now go on a journey through his recent exhibition in Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada, that was on from January - March 1988.

This installation of work comes under the heading 'untitled' 1986/7. This 'untitled' show is an assembly of 52 canvases, each measuring 8' x 4'. A slightly different version was exhibited in Dallas in 1987.

The show opens with eight panels that represent the sphere of subjectivity. (Pl. 6). The panels are predominantly red with a

small circular insert of black and white on each panel. The black and white signify signs and language which represent Heaven/Hell, God, Life/Death etc. These signs date back to the mid 70's. The signs are both self explanatory and at the same time obscure. The signs in the red colour do not seem to correspond or make any sense with the 'language' signs on the same panel. Perhaps he is commenting on the lack of intimacy our society fosters, that there is a big gap between the thoughts in our minds and the world outside us.

The next pieces are two gridded red fans called 'History'. (Pl. 7). The signs are arranged in chronological order towards the outer circle. His vocabulary employs a combination of stick figures, similar to public graffiti and semi abstract symbols that resemble ancient hieroglyphics or medieval stone markings. These entire semi circular zones are painted in red, the subjective. It contains everything from religious symbols to MacDonald's arches - references both familiar and oblique; unicellular organisms, ancient cave drawings and industrial smoke stacks; the aura of archaeological artefacts and advanced scientific experiments. The two fans are reminiscent of an ancient calendar, a medicine wheel or a rose window of a medieval church, a mandala of signs and symbols. Quite deliberately Mullican's circle 'history' is in two halves. "World narratives may indeed be cyclical but the best we can do is to imply such patterns, each tailored to its teller, from fragmentary arches". (10) The two arches are dominated by the profile of a head at their outer periphery. This symbol alerts the audience to the persistent nature of the space around it. It seems to signify a 'collective

unconscious' that it is not a whole but is split down the middle. The next piece is a panoramic view of a cityscape. (Pl. 8). The drawing is rendered on one point perspective, the centre of the cityscape ending at the vanishing point. This technique was used by many Renaissance artists. In 'The School of Athens' by Michaelangelo the vanishing point is also the focal point of attention. The point where Aristotle and Plato descend from the school. Mullican has represented his cityscape in hierarchies and strict categories. The picture is divided into five sections, each with its own colour code and symbols. 'The World Unframed' is blue, representing the icons of the establishment such as banks and churches. This section is close to ~~the~~ pinpoint of infinity suggesting a political hierarchy. 'The World Framed' in yellow represents artistic institutions such as museums and concert halls. This section is perfectly balanced in the centre reaching back to infinity. It is placed in a similar position to Aristotle and Plato in 'The School of Athens'.

Beneath the cityscape are eight panels in blue. The images depict the 'Unframed World', the everyday life around us. There is a couple sitting at a table surrounded by a plan of their house, the domestic side of life. The other half of blue depicts industrial images, a microscope, a furnace, a still and a steam generator.

Beneath the 'Blue' panels is an abstracted anatomical figure that looks like a living machine. (Pl. 9). A part traffic light, part plumbing figure, like a regulator and generator for a sign system. A channel from the figure leads to the other half of the picture, to

the green 'elemental' world full of animals that becomes a human evolution chart. The whole painting depicts a continuing progression from culture to nature. The final eight panels are all green. (Pl.10). Beginning with the decay of a human skeleton in a landscape to weather maps and finally the 'elements', the two panels of elements being a grid of dots.

The whole installation is like being taken on a journey from 'top' to 'bottom', the subjective to the elemental, or Heaven to Hell. The journey is similar to his concepts for his Bath Flat Sculpture. "So first you have no meaning without any physicality, and then you get to the total absence of meaning".(11)

CHAPTER III - FOOTNOTES

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3. Ferdinand de Saussure, "Course in General Linguistics", P.72.
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5. IBID.
6. Donald Kuspit, Review, Artforum, (November 1988) P.140.
7. IBID.
8. Nancy Princenthal, Matt Mullican, Catalogue. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1986/7. P.4.
9. Jacques Lacan by Lawrence Gripe, Artscribe, Review, 1987. P.80.
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CHAPTER IV

MULLICAN'S PHILOSOPHY

Drawing on the universal language of visual symbols as seen daily in streets, stations and airports, Mullican creates his own pictorial language. Through this means he represents his own subjective vision of the world. "I want to deflate the seriousness embodied in the symbols, to blend the universal with the everyday".(1) His images are fragments of a universe entirely of his own devising. Until recently Mullican's work has seldom been designed to appear outdoors as it has been largely restricted to art gallery venues. "If public art is viewed as establishing or reinforcing values via readily accessible pictorial content, Mullican's art is something else again".(2) It does not use public space; he notes and only simulates public metaphors.

Mullican's work sculpture in his project for Bath is based on the Matt Mullican was invited to the Bath International Festival in 1988. He was representing his country to make work specifically for the city. This was his first one man show in Great Britain. The format of the show was as follows. In the Artiste Gallery he exhibited over 400 two foot square images, drawn from his own pictographic language. (Pl. 11). He also hung large banners across a pedestrian arcade, a place where people have a little more time to stop and look up. (Pls. 12 & 13). These banners created a festive atmosphere. One of these banners depicts a grid of eight squares, each a recognisable symbol for the arts, a symbol for theatre, dance,

literature, music, film, painting, photography and sculpture. These were appropriate images for an arts festival.

The third element to the exhibition was a large sculptural stone paving. (Pls. 14, 15 and 16). This permanent piece of work was sited in Beauford Square, adjacent to the Royal Theatre. The other two pieces were only exhibited for the duration of the festival. The indoor gallery installation acted as a reference for the other two works. This piece is very in-keeping with its surroundings. Mullican chose to use local Bath stone from a nearby quarry which gives the piece a sense of belonging to the locality.

Dan Cameron interviewed Mullican in conjunction with his work in Bath. There have been many interpretations of Mullican's work, but the most accurate comes from an interview directly with the artist.

Mullican's main sculpture in his project for Bath is based on the plan of an idealised city. He chose the plan of a city as it is basically a symbol for his work as a whole. He used the city plan as an abstraction of the way he experiences things. Its structure represents different ways he can approach any given objects or experience. "The city is symbolic of cities and how they refer to things". (3) His city is symbolic in that it does not define a real city for real people. This follows right through all of his work. His posters and banners are not real but representations of the real. This allows him freedom of expression. "On one level, all of those things exist in the city, while on another level none of those

things exist in the city because it is not a real city".(4) Mullican stresses that it is symbolic and not real, as people have asked him where the cinema or houses etc. are on the plan.

What does exist within Mullican's city? Dan Cameron asks how does the city shift from the real to the symbolic realm? The answer is that it does so through art. When an 'object' is put in an art gallery it is no longer in its original context. It has been symbolically repositioned. This 'object' is within a 'Framed World', the gallery. Mullican's city plan is also in such a world, as it is perceived as art.

Mullican's work is unusually complex, to many viewers indecipherable. Yet what throws the viewer off balance is its clear simplified imagery. This ordered plan originates from a highly complex, abstracted theory of the nature of our reality. He redefines our world through abstraction.

Mullican's city plan is divided into five different sections. From one section across to the other, the subjective and language are represented. The relationship between experience and language has given rise to much analysis. It has been described as like moving from the 'invisible' world into the 'visible' world; the transition from 'absence' to 'presence'. Ferdinand de Saussure has discussed the arbitrary link between the signified and the signifier, the subjective concept and the sound image, the transition from the invisible to the visible. Derrida wrote "We are alienated even from

ourselves through language". (5) We are not fully present without using a system of signs that is not ours but a social institution.

In the subjective section of Mullican's city plan language is but invisible lines between points of reference or interest. "Your body doesn't exist any more as a physical thing; language isn't physical, it's a point where you physically cease to exist yourself". (6) In the subjective section, vibes, hunches, intuitions and relationships between millions of images exist. It is a state of pure meaning that has not yet been realised.

Within the city plan there are a number of symbolic passages or channels, they could be called roads. These are the language, subjective world framed, elemental and the sign's channels. The system is similar to a labyrinth, maze or puzzle, indicating the need to decide where to go - through which door and down which street. This is equivalent to the decisions we all make every day when travelling through our own city. Plans for spaces like cities or gardens can be abstracted diagrams of mental awareness.

At the centre of Mullican's plan, the World Framed, there are three options: you can remain in the World Framed; enter the Subjection Section on one side, or the Elemental on the other side. These two sides are like opposites, two poles. There is a very thin line between the two opposites. Within our minds there is a simultaneous dichotomy between the subjective and the object. Mullican first discovered this switch from the object to the subject in the

performance with the cadaver in 1975. The body was both an object and a subject, he found himself continually referring to the cadaver as both 'it' and 'him'. "We can look at all objects either materially or conceptually".(7) Mullican is illustrating the 'inbetweenness' of things. One way of understanding or grasping his theory is to imagine a pendulum hanging above the centre of the plan. This pendulum is constantly swinging to and fro, always in motion. Our state of 'absence' and 'presence' are forever in motion, never in one particular 'frame' of mind. It's only from the centre (the pivot of the pendulum) that you can see the whole city.

Mullican describes his city as a game plan where you jump from one section to another. The passages can be seen as channels of perception. At the moment Mullican is working on a computer city in which the viewer will physically move through the space. The whole plan would change depending on the area you were in. In the computerised city from the subjective section the viewer would literally not see the elemental section, it would be incomprehensible. When entering the 'Framed World' the viewer would have passed through the intermediate area of signs. It would then be possible to talk to both the subjective and the objective. "Everything's now been reduced to a common ground of physical signs".(8) In Mullican's system, language is constructed and without it life would be a blur, possibly meaningless. All his ideas would be a lot easier to realise on site or in his computer city. The presence of a visual network is necessary in order to understand his conceptual intentions.

Mullican emphasises that the whole network is totally symbolic. To walk into the 'Elemental' physically is not possible in reality. "You would have no memory and no recognition of anything going on there". (9) The city symbolises Mullican's understanding of existence. More appropriately it represents what he doesn't and can't understand fully, the known and the unknown and all the complexities within that. Our world is indefinable, therefore a symbolic plan is maybe the only possible grid. It is an architecturally idealised view of the world as he perceives it. Mullican has often been asked does he believe in the cosmology that he represents? He invents what he wants to believe, not necessarily what he believes. "I don't necessarily believe in the cosmology, but I do believe in the notion of believing in a system like this". (10)

"But everything somehow does have a rhythm to it and we like to see that represented in charts, to know that there's not so much chaos out there". (11)

Mullican completed another flat public piece in 1987 in Munster, Germany. (Pl.17). Similar to the Bath piece, Mullican sandblasted his images onto the granite.

"Like the pyramids and hieroglyphs it will remain when all else vanishes, signs of both life and death, humanistic and technocratic, nature and machines. Colloquial signs of our civilisation, a martini glass and a coffee cup. Seen from the sky. From another planet. A record of us after we have gone". (12)

This is a very fresh, imaginative way of interpreting Mullican's work. The Munster piece is in fact much more detailed than the Bath project. The physicality of the carving is much more architectural in the latter. Such an appearance refers it back to the city of Bath. The Bath piece had to be walked around, The Munster piece is more like a stage, you could walk on it. "It was a podium, it was a chart, it was a map". (13) The images are more recognisable and need less explanation. The piece depicts fragments that make up a skeleton, a steam engine, a still, a complete evolutionary chart and some of Mullican's more abstract signs.

"We understand it or we don't, but it's not so much about giving you a lot of information". (14) There is some information that is more easily accessible. The evolutionary chart (Munster), the meaning chart and the sign chart are recognisable for people. The public can relate to the work with all its complexities or they can enquire a little deeper. Even when enquiring deeper Mullican's signs can still seem unreadable. Perhaps it is precisely this 'not knowing' that is the crux of the project. Mullican has undoubtedly a powerful introverted dialogue with these symbols and cityscapes, but the work appears as impersonal as the public sign in an airport. It might all come down to a statement on the lack of intimacy our society fosters. "His genuinely personal use of an impersonal system generates friction in his work". (15) His work is like the combination of both a dictionary and a diary.

It is important for Mullican that his work is in-keeping with its surroundings. "Buildings take a long time to build".(16) If an environment took time and labour to evolve so should any object that is installed in it. The art object will then become part of the environment. A piece of art in an outdoor public site should be designed to last, as a building is. The piece will become weathered but it will not lose its function. Often public sculpture is not made to last, says Mullican. After five years it can look horrible, get damaged or spray painted. Mullican's two outdoor pieces are in a horizontal position and therefore much less aggressive and much less likely to be vandalised. The carved surface will weather as naturally as a gravestone in a cemetery. Also a ground, flat sculpture invites a certain awareness of the context into which it is placed. Mullican's piece is made from Bath stone as are its surrounding buildings. Yet another element that helps it become a part of the city.

"Mullican's keen, if sceptical interest in the possibility of a universal language frames his involvement with 'Public Art'.(17)

He likes to place his work in public places but its status there is subversive. He questions the inevitability of seemingly natural images, suggesting that our most reliable forms of cultural interaction are subject to confusion.

CHAPTER IV - FOOTNOTES

1. Matt Mullican, Catalogue, Goldie Paley Gallery, Philadelphia. Septemer 1987. P.3.
2. Holland Cotter, Public Paradise, Goldie Paley Gallery, p. 4.
3. MULLICAN Catalogue, Artiste Gallery, Bath, 1988. P.5.
4. IBID.
5. Jacques Derrida, Structuralism by John Sturrock, P.139.
6. MULLICAN, P.5.
7. MULLICAN, P.6.
8. IBID.
9. MULLICAN, P.7.
10. MULLICAN, P.9.
11. MULLICAN, P.7.
12. Donald Kuspit, The Critics Way, Artforum, September 1987. P.118.
13. MULLICAN, P.9.
14. IBID.
15. Lawrence Gripe, Personal and Impersonal in Conflict, Artweek, February 14 1987. P.1.
16. MULLICAN, P.7.
17. Nancy Princenthal, Matt Mullican Catalogue, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1986/7. P.5

CHAPTER V

THE POSTMODERN BODY

A POETIC INSIGHT

Mullican's work is an exception in the midst of Postmodern pandemonium, "In the face of the unrelenting hurry, between evening plans and morning strategies, affecting the life of a big apple whose seeds rot before any has a chance to take a bite, his work keeps".(1)

Denys Zacharopoulos wrote a very thought provoking essay on Mullican that is a poetic art piece in itself. Here is a summary of his inspirations and interpretations.

Cultural commodities and symbolic values that are placed within history are discordant and inconsistent. There is a gap between difference and identity. The only place where the world is consistent is within language. Through language Mullican succeeds in crisscrossing the field of sense and the field of art, at the same time, from the similarities to the differences. His artistic forms and sense are in constant shift. "It's poetic and logical merge as in mathematics".(2) The work is both real and imaginary, the invention and the sign. The work is neither a process nor a fact but a movement swinging between both. It questions what is and what is not, "within the in-between space between a thing and the thing itself".(3) His system is as closeknit and consistent as a

mathematical grammar and as free flowing and continuous as a river.

"It is both sense and nonsense ... logic and Utopia".(4) It is hard to point out exactly where Mullican's works emphasis lie as it seems to exist somewhere 'in-between'.

"It's a work that catches the art of a time - ours".(5)

Mullican is commonly seen as developing subjective mechanisms that tap into 'universal meanings'. Such assessments tend to place the work outside history, more on a mystical plane. "Perhaps a rather bold and certainly anachronistic attempt in our age of fragmentation and deconstruction".(6) Yet Mullican is very much a part of his own time. From his installations to his performances to his paintings he very much carries the sense of the 'postmodern body'.

The 'postmodern body' is borrowed from Fredric Jameson to describe a contemporary subject decentred, floating in a mass of repeated and repeatable images, in our late capitalist world. "Postmodern body, ... bereft of spatial co-ordinates and practically ... incapable of distantation".(7) Jameson proposes a map that will help the subject to find its way among these surfaces. He provides no concrete example of what these maps are. He remains an idealist. Mullican's art directly relates to these theoretical issues. His imagery is derived from our decentered, decentering post modern environment. "He engages in a kind of mapmaking by exploring the terrain of the unconscious through hypnosis, commandeering the imagination on fantasy voyages into perspectual space and manoeuvring the

viewer-reader across the distance between signs and their meaning".(8) Mullican has constructed an artificial map or structure to reach his own solutions. He emphasises the artificial and arbitrary nature of his solution. The very arbitrariness of his signs stops his art becoming an idealised view of the world.

There was a time when one or two people were able to take the whole of knowledge in their province into one book, this book being the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1744-1785). In 1788 the plan of drawing on specialist learning was first adopted. "Thus we know when the unity of knowledge was fragmented".(9) In the 1987 edition 10,000 recognised experts were involved in its preparation. The taxonomy of information became so overwhelming in our Euro/American world that in the mid 19th century there was a taxonomic collapse. Our world has become a chaos of classification.

"It is very 20th century to see the world in terms of systems. It is quite modern to see all systems as prone to breakdown. It is the essence of postmodernism to define the system by its breaking point, to see the world as a humanly imposed system of distortion".(10)

Mullican's art is very much involved in the dispensation of information. His work at first glance appears to celebrate information and its culture. He exploits the way we read commercial culture through his graphic elements. Perhaps his array of overwhelming symbols that appear to reveal a meaning have no meaning. This would confirm the collapse of classification.

A postmodern body is satisfied with fragments, not with something whole. The need to find a balance is gone. Information, which has increasingly become the content of the image can float free of connections. When living in a society with an increasing deluge of information one accepts randomness. Categories that were once elements of structural unity refuse any one identity and become a blur of discontinuity. The avant garde artist missed a world which had a sense of wholeness and unity. "Dadaists wished to turn like a distorting mirror on the distortions society had created". (11) Unlike the avant garde artist the postmodernist has become part of and accepted our fragmented, decentred society. The latter has been absorbed into capitalist society, the former was an outcast.

Mullican's work in a typically postmodern fashion needs an infusion of words before it communicates. After some research his work is still not totally decipherable, maybe the art is not supposed to be totally comprehensible. Our communication systems are so specialised and continually in flux that it is not possible to understand it all. We live in an age of mechanical fatigue and intellectual strength, a post industrial age. With systems constantly changing, we have no choice but to follow whether or not we understand the systems. Mullican's work shows the power our language system has over our lives. Our generation was born into a world without unity, an open ended book, moving from volume to volume. His work is open ended, a life long project. He deals with a subject that is never static, there are always new possibilities and no easy answer.

HIERARCHICAL ORDERS/LAYERS

Mullican has always been aware of possible hierarchical orders within things. With the ladder of existence for instance, the subject and object could be seen as Heaven and Hell. This idea is based on drawings from his early childhood "charts of dividing up reality".(12) The bottom of the chart would represent the breaking down of the body, a classical vision of Hell as the material world. The top is Heaven where physicality is absent. In Heaven you don't need anything because you don't physically exist. Mullican's early fascination with the idea of 'presence' and 'absence' or Hell and Heaven is very much a basis of his art.

A painting called 'The Paris Opera House' (Pl. 18) and also a 1918 steamship are like complete hierarchically organised establishments, "like a stratified box" (13) an extension of the idea of Heaven and Hell. The lower classes live on the ground floor with 200 bunk beds in a room. On the next level there are 2 bunkbeds and a bathroom. At each level going upwards the living conditions improve "so different levels contain different ideas about what the body is".(14)

On the top of the deck you are all powerful. All opportunities are open to you. You are encouraged to develop your mind - libraries, concert halls and all the arts are available on the upper deck. At the bottom of this hierarchical order you are just your body. This order is very much in keeping with dichotomies that exist in our real

world. The rich vs. the poor, the upper vs. the lower classes, and on a more global level the third world vs. the Euro/American world.

The poor are totally occupied with surviving, keeping their bodies healthy and alive. Life circulates around the body. The rich need not worry about survival physically. Instead the mind is educated and entertained. Ideally there should be a balance where both the physical and the mental are given equal sustenance. "He creates an emblem of social elitism and political oppression". (15)

This critical aspect to his work may be its most deeply felt and personal side. "I hate banners myself". (16) The whole emblematic paraphernalia of factionalism makes him nervous. Colours and signs distinguish nation from nation, team from team. His personal opinion gives us a clue to the irony inherent in his relationship with his own work. He is often asked does he believe in the pictographic universe that he is creating. He says that he believes and disbelieves it at the same time. "What is clear is the critical distance operating in his cosmology". (17) Irony is only part of the substance of his work. The other part is the extraordinary poetic, fictional world.

He uses materials not normally associated with 'High Art' such as poster design, crafts and computer image-making. Using such a broad range of materials he sets up a non-hierarchical situation. Each image or element retains its own identity yet has a unique importance to the whole.

Mullican became interested in craft manufacture in 1981/82. He visited India where he got his designs made into coloured banners by local tailors. Since then he has employed craftspeople in a variety of mediums from stained glass to stone carving to flags and banners. Introducing 'Low Art' craftsmanship, Mullican is crossing traditional boundaries. He tries to reverse accepted values. He exhibits granite wall plaques in an indoor gallery, but this is a material that we usually associate with the outdoor. This also carries certain political implications. Any message, good or bad, becomes persuasive when carved in an official medium.

Mullican's paintings are actually rubbings taken from an original. A rubbing is usually an impression taken from an object of exceptional aesthetic or historic value. For example, to record a pictograph design made by a prehistoric artist, the rubbing technique is most often used. His rubbings subsequently also reverse accepted values. The value of the original is the copy that it creates. The originals are made out of materials that are flimsy and useless. "The copy alone is art".(18) This technique also allowed him to create pieces on a larger scale. "The monumental content implicit in the rubbing technique is Mullican's complex, personal vision of the nature of the universe, wherein a cosmological history is hierarchically ordered".(19)

Mullican has built all sorts of unexpected hierarchical layers. His images, like The Opera House, contain rationally enlightened ideas

that have gone haywire. His neo-baroque and neo-classical 'Opera Houses' are but non-product dreams of the 19th century bourgeoisie. They do not display the highest pitch of culture but rather an analysis of social hierarchies.

"They are the gravestones of a culture". (20)

CHAPTER V - FOOTNOTES

THE POSTMODERN BODY

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2. IBID.
3. IBID.
4. IBID.
5. Denys Sacharopoulos, P.12.
6. Paul Groot. Matt Mullican, Parkett 17, 1988. P.93
7. Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" New Left Review 146, 1987. P.87.
8. Kathy O'Dell, "Through the Image Maze", Art in America, January 1988. P.119.
9. Daniel Bell, The Coming of Post Industrial Society, New York Basic Books, 1976. P.174.
10. Charles Newman, The Postmodern Aura, "The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation", Salmagundi, 1984. PP. 63-64.
11. Steven Henry Madoff, "What is Postmodern about Painting: The Scandinavia Lectures II", Arts Magazine, October 1985. P.59.

HIERARCHICAL LAYERS

12. MULLICAN, P.8.
13. IBID.
14. IBID.
15. Holland Cotter "Public Paradise" Goldie Paley Gallery Catalogue, Philadelphia, September 1987. P.12.
16. IBID.
17. IBID.
18. Holland Cotter, P.16.
19. Holland Cotter, P.8.
20. Paul Groot, Matt Mullican. P.95.

CONCLUSION

"Rarely in the history of art has any one artist attempted to depict and classify the origin, processes and structure of the universe".(1) Mullican continually works within a structure otherwise his thoughts would go haywire. He continually refers to the 'inbetweenness' of things, possibilities that are impossible to pinpoint, provoking an imbalance. His work can at first glance appear quite shallow and impersonal, yet through careful scrutiny, it contains a very personal and thought provoking content. His invented cosmological system is inspired by public graphic images and his own individual visions.

"His genuinely personal use of an impersonal system generates friction in the work. In the end it may be this irreconcilable difference that allows it to endure".(2) Contradictions run through all his work: simple and complex, personal and impersonal, life and death and public and private; dualisms that he believes exist within our bodies and minds. Our desire towards order and control tends to repress such opposites. Within a system that seems ordered and controlled he reminds us that dualisms do exist.

Mullican's work is on-going and forever changing, it is therefore difficult to summarise. His work hopes to catalogue the entire spectrum of knowledge, "the world is more a project than a subject for reinterpretation".(3) Although the content will continually evolve he says "the book ends"(4) are unlikely to change, the front cover being the human head and the back cover the breakdown of

molecules into a molecular pattern. Mullican's world always reverts back to obscurity, as if there is a fog resting in front of the image. The image is never all that clear. Ferdinand de Saussure emphasised the impermanence and arbitrariness between given signs. Mullican's art reveals this arbitrariness.

He is very much an artist of our time, an artist who classifies our existence, everything seems ordered and controlled. His 'Opera Houses' illustrate hierarchical orders and his colour code divides the world into sections and systems. We live in a world that has become a chaos of classification, a place that we see in terms of systems.

Unfortunately systems are prone to breakdown and distortion. Mullican's work does not make total sense. His world is not a harmonious, balanced one but is full of uncertainties and surprises.

CONCLUSION - FOOTNOTES

1. Sue Grace, Concentrations 15, January 1987. P.11.
2. Lawrence Gripe, "Personal and Impersonal in Conflict", Artweek, February 14, 1987. P.1.
3. IBID.
4. Janet Kutner, Dallas, Matt Mullican, Artnews, April 1987. P.29.

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