

ART by John Fitzgibbon

(John Fitzgibbon's Narrative (c. 1980))

The first day I went to work at Sacramento State I saw something nice, one of those things that stays with you always. Late in the afternoon, after teaching, I was walking across the Commons in company with the sculptor Bill Geis, in what we hoped was the direction of the Cafeteria. The man stretched out in sleep under a Japanese mimosa tree we recognized first by his costume – faded jeans, boots, a denim shirt – as our colleague, Assistant Professor William Allan. Allan had evidently found his first day at the college rather enervating, as first days can be. Among the many reasons I didn't wake Bill Allan was the consideration that he is one of country's best artists – a realization I had already come to in 1968 and that Geis had come to years ago, when he and Allan were rookie stars of the American art world, though barely out of art school, and that now, a dozen years later, most informed people share. A person in Bill's boots deserves all the rest he can get.

Was it always thus? In our department, I mean?

I'm afraid not.

Take, for instance, Jack Ogden, known to the world as an artists' artist, and a pretty hard-knocking painter as West Coast artists go. This painter, it is told, wore a tie to school every day the first year he taught at Sac State. Jack had for many years been a high school teacher. He wasn't about to go back!

Art department vs. art department: the opposition is not at all facetious. In a sense it is even the critical distinction when it comes to the history of college art departments in the United States. And when it comes to figuring out how a welter-weight University in a minor-league city came to possess, for a time, an art staff the equal of any school's anywhere, then it really will have to be understood that there exists an inverse ratio between an art department's "respectability" and those crucial qualities and attitudes which permit a department to enjoy the art world's respect. Late in the 60's at Sacramento State a dean and a department chairman took a chance. They reached out to the Bay Area, to Southern California, to Chicago, and even to New York and they hired some really, truly art celebrities with paint on their shoes and a painting or two in a museum or three. These artists variously looked like Charlie Chaplin, refused to travel by plane, carried a purse instead of a wallet, consulted the stars, forgot to vote, did tai [chee] in the stairwell, ate nothing but sprouts, spelled "professor" in a number of endearing ways, doodled masterpieces in the bathrooms, and when recruited for a television panel on the Meaning of Art picked their nose on camera and said not one word. The women artists bought their clothes in 1948. At a department meeting they looked so great you could hardly take your lousy sexist eyes off them and listen to the report on repair of major equipment.

The chairman responsible for the influx of important artists was Irving Marcus, a painter who then thought he might be good enough to be part of the national scene and by now is pretty well on his way to it. He cared more about this than about growing roses and moving to a neighborhood where the schools are good. The dean was the late Harvey P. Reddick, a man who had an adventurous streak in him, and who, as a performing musician, had a better grasp than most administrators of how high the stakes can go when major art is the issue. Like Marcus he was bored about two-thirds silly and like the artists whose contracts he signed he was aware that he might not live to see Thursday. So he took some risks.

In retrospect it doesn't seem it was much of a risk to hire Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt, in our generation the two best painters to come out of Chicago, the art metropolis which for post-1945 art history is likely to have something of the import Flanders had for the [Quattrocento] or that German Expressionism had for the school of Paris earlier in this century. But the outcome of this particular Art Stakes was, in the late 60's, far from decided and only a few observers, including, fortunately, Irv Marcus, had the prescience to see the result. Even now, in 1980, it would be wise to be bet the Nutt-Nilsson "exacta" both ways. They are a closely matched couple, and marriage is the subject of both painters' amoebic expressionism. In Jim's menacing comedy men and women are in each other's grip; Gladys' world of stylized, biomorphic figures is less agonized and less driven: her charming creatures preen and moon about in an agreeable silliness that is no less truthful than the tense hostilities revealed in Jim's two-way fun-house mirror. In Sacramento they lived in River Park, a short walk from the Campus, and did everything together – except visit the other's studio. They spent the whole time indoors during their tour here, the way you do it in Chicago, with Jim even building a covered walkway so that one could go from the house to the garage-studio without danger from the Sacramento elements. Gladys and Jim shopped at the market where their neighbor Bob Else buys his groceries, and this they did together, too, with Gladys making the selections from California's bewildering array of fresh vegetables while Jim stayed up front and read magazines from the rack. At night they watched old Hollywood movies on television, and once in a while would recommend one that shouldn't be missed. Jim Nutt was a stickler for working the departmental rules to this best advantage and he was a tireless agitator for such things as his Early Promotion (Professional Merit), which he wished for not so much for the salary increment as for the relevance he perceived to his honor. Ironically enough, "Professional Merit" was the undoing of Jim Nutt's career as Cal State professor. After a time he and his wife began to make the kind of money that causes things to be uncomfortable for everybody, and Gladys and Jim had to quit teaching and quit Sacramento and go back in triumph to Chicago, where they remain today, the [chiefest] totems for rich people there. In the department here Jim and Gladys kept their distance and made only a few close friends – not, to my regret, including me; but at night when the late movie comes on Jim and Gladys are remembered hereabouts by more than their friends as a couple of painters we are glad we didn't miss, and in the department their loss will always be felt because in our field the axiom does hold: the best artists make the best teachers.

Everyone when he sets out to write has in mind an ideally sympathetic reader, a rather smart person, quite smart as a matter of fact, who doesn't miss the small touches and feels pained when the jokes don't come off, if they don't and who likes movies of the 30's and 40's, and prefers California wines to French on the mysterious ground that California painting is just as good and just like Paris or N.Y., and just possibly can tell the difference between Jim Nutt's group of painters, The Hairy Who, and the work of the Chicago Monster Roster of one generation earlier. My actual reader, I'm pretty sure, is an amiable academic person from another discipline than mine, a person whose desk is covered with exams that need grading and who instead of dreaming about his or her sabbatical leave coming through is wasting time riffling through this enchiridion, looking for the good parts and dwelling for a minute or two with me. This reader, as I imagine him, is a formulator of idle questions, such as Who is the third best painter out of Chicago in our day and age.

Surprise! The question does have a bearing on our story. The third best Chicago painter is maybe Ed Paschke, or it's maybe Karl Wirsum, or it's maybe Roger Brown, or it's maybe someone else. Most people I know would probably give it to Wirsum, an original member of the Hairy Who. Years ago this young artist attracted attention at the CAA annual meeting where thousands of artists come to apply for dozens of jobs. Karl was dressed to match the absurdity of the situation. To the job interview he wore army dungarees, a hard hat and tennis sneakers, and carried a baseball bat. Someone said, he must not want a job because nobody is going to hire him dressed like that! I said, you are probably wrong on both counts. Not long afterwards Karl Wirsum was hired to teach part-time at Sacramento State.

The jarring, ferocious color, zig-zag design elements, and bi-lateral symmetry of Wirsum's figure paintings are fueled by his interest in tribal art and in the art of children, maniacs, and so-called "primitives." Wirsum, Nutt, Nilsson, and later the artists Joan Moment and Phil Hitchcock learned that at our school this interest in "Outsider Art" had been pioneered locally by Dr. Don Uhlin, a distinguished scholar in Art Education and his colleague Dr. Tarmo Pasto, the indomitable old Finn who started the department in a bungalow back in [195?]. Both men had formed valuable collections of the curious but far from hapless art which is sometimes produced by institutionalized people. These collaborations between the Chicago contingent and the art educators were instances of those too rare occasions when specialists literally run across each other, to their mutual benefit.

Karl Wirsum lived with his family down at the foot of E St. in a cottage full of antique toys and a McGovern sign poking out above the weeds out front. He would teach only one class per semester, though he was offered more. Into this class he would pour all he had. For his students it was a magical treat. Apparently Wirsum felt that teaching was like true love: you can't have it MWF at 9 and then all over again at 11 on something new. And then, too, he wasn't really in Sacramento to teach so much as he was to be in bicycling reach of his friends Jim and Gladys. For work and play he wore a baseball cap turned backwards, like a catcher, along with suspenders over a sweatshirt; and this last a good thing, too, because his pants, with the chain leg rolled at the cuff, were invariably 3 or 4 sizes too large, like Stan Laurel in a barrel. Wirsum and I got along but he was always wary of me because I

drove a yellow Italian sports car and this fact convinced him that I was rich. In 1972 the State Department asked me to give some lectures in South America on the subject of California art and I asked them to send along a big current exhibition of the work of my colleagues, here and at Davis; they said OK and I insisted that the paintings of Wirsum (and of Wayne Thiebaud) be added to the extant exhibition which the government had agreed to pick up. This softened Wirsum's attitude toward me but only in the way, you know, that we admit that the eccentricity of the rich can lead them to do good once in a while. It continued to please him to believe that I was rich. After a while I believe that this pleased me as well.

The main thing Karl Wirsum accomplished in his years in Sacramento was the construction and painting of puppets for a play of his own devising. A delightful short film of this activity was made at the time by Suzanne Simpson, then finishing her degree with us. This film was shown at the Bienal de Sao Paolo in 1973 when Nutt, Nilsson, Wirsum headed the Made in Chicago show which represented the USA that year. At this writing Suzanne has completed 5 documentary films on noted West Coast artists. They are entertaining and beautiful all, but one may harbor a special fondness for her film on Wirsum, a man who thinks that everybody ought to have a good job, regardless of his wardrobe.

In Sacramento the Chicago connection endures into a second generation with the arrival in 1976 of Philip Hitchcock as chairman. An artist interested in process, performance, and conceptual art, he had been, in Chicago, quite literally surrounded by hundreds of students drawing pimples, armpits, and goiters – subject matter introduced into art by the Hairy Who and unbeknownst to graduate students in Chicago, Sacramento, or anywhere else, absolutely bound to disappear from art the moment work by Gladys, Jim, and Karl began to pile up in Museums, Biennials, and private collections around the world. Hitchcock's idea of a good piece of art, enacted at the important Edinburgh Festival, was, after some preliminary months working with hard-case convicts, to walk the streets of the Scottish capitol with felons and desperados. The authorities of Prison who connived in this piece understood it; the director of the prestigious Festival did not. He wondered if it were art. To the colleagues who bought Philip to Sacramento it looked like the work of an artist aware of the primary relation of art to human freedom.

One of Hitchcock's first moves was to initiate a student and faculty exchange program with the Art Institute of Chicago. Already the route is well-worn. This official affiliation, from the faculty's point of view, is more meaningful than the welcome chance to touch base it provides originally mid-western artists like the photographer Roger Vail and the developing abstract painter Oliver Jackson. For about as long as CSUS has been in existence and had such a thing as a department of art America has enjoyed an unchallenged hegemony in the visual arts. And this leadership has been, basically, a New York phenomenon. Artists everywhere have had a choice whether to style what they are doing on one or another New York sanctioned mode of art or to risk provinciality (and New York neglect) by attempting something different. An enormous number of artists have thought to solve this dilemma by moving to New York. Nor does this always turn out badly. One of our best

graduate students of the 70's, Don Hazlitt, went immediately to New York, where these days to far-flung acclaim he turns out works which some resemblance to the paintings of Ralph Humphreys. The innate taste and flair for the beautiful in his work make is a sure thing that this young artist, who used to pump gas in Stockton, will shortly emerge from the New York pack and be a New York artist to reckon with in the 80's. And there have been others, like Victor Faccinto, a painter and maker of "underground" animated films.

But it is as a haven for art-independence, not as a feeder school for New York, that the CSUS department deserves this footnote in the history of art. A haven, that is, for artists with an independent statement to make, for artists, that is, whose work acquires part of its character and import from the very fact that it is being made far from the madding crowd. A haven, in other words, for artists who do not believe that the best art of an era must be made in a single place and who contend with the force of their lives and art that if there is, after all, to be a single place then New York City is the least likely of locales to nourish their feelings and their vision. Such contentious ambition wants quick distinguishing, of course, from the safe, self-satisfied tenure-garden where nothing is happening and nothing is supposed to happen until everyone is happily dead – the situation all too often hankered after by more than enough university art departments west of the Hudson.

In general, the best New York art, like Ralph Humphrey's, has been for some little time, about art itself; about the rules, strategies, internal conventions for making a painting; about such "issues" as "object vs. illusion," "depicted vs. literal." Most of these battles, for simplicity's sake, are fought on abstract ground. The best art made deliberately Outside New York, like Bill Allan's, or Joseph Raffael's, or Jim Albertson's, is more often than not figurative in some way and is plainly about life, not art. The art of Northern California, especially work coming out of Sacramento State (and from those neighborly fields of shared spiritual vision at Davis) has always been about the chances for a better society and the possibility, at this late date, for a personal salvation. Rather than with merely formal questions, Sacramento art deals with what counts and what doesn't; it is about looking out for the wrong turns; it is about seeing what is inevitable; it is about how to keep a clear mind in a decaying body. Where New York works typically have irrelevant, after-the-fact titles, or are called No. 15, or simply "Untitled," Bill Allan's paintings, founded on a radical respect for Nature as supreme arbiter, require titles to complete their meaning: Shadow repair for the Western man; Deception Pass; Tentative Assault on Mt. Fear. Albertson's scathing pessimism and defiant raunchiness (he came out of Chicago Art Institute shortly after Nutt) hardly ally him with the ethereal purity of Allan's transcendental landscape paintings. Yet, he is linked to Allan and, like Allan, separated from art as it is known in New York by the fact that in paintings like the lurid Sex, Violence, Religion, and the Good Life, shown at the important "Bad" painting show at the New Museum in New York, Albertson takes an interest in questions like, Why are we here? and, What should we do next? Or at least he regards these questions as still unsolved. Albertson taught briefly but memorably at Sacramento State in the 70's. I point to his sojourn with us because he is among the best younger painters in America and because the uncompromising qualities in his painting make it hard to imagine where else he would have been as welcome. Raffael, from Brooklyn, and

educated at Cooper Union and Yale, was virtually the first post-war painter to turn to the photograph (long taboo as a source of pictorial energy). An elegant virtuoso of the brush and a colorist not less glamorous than Renoir or Rubens, Raffael was successful by every standard and already a rising figure in the New York scheme of things when, nonetheless, the hustle-bustle of the art world started to pall for him and, attracted by the climate of the vision in Northern California, he moved here for good. Once at Sacramento State his name grew ever larger on the West Coast, a consequence of the stunning parade of big [N]ature pictures – paintings emphasizing the wholeness, monumentality, and integrity of the image – which now replaced the fragmented, chopped and dislocated images of suffering people and creatures Raffael had produced in the New York milieu.

The great Water and Lily paintings of the 70's are still swept by a continuous sub-current of pain, but this is perhaps only the perpetual and irreducible pain of Being, from which no creature can escape, and in these new masterpieces, as I can truly call them, this fundamental pain is assuaged by a tide of spiritual feeling and a deep sense of the oneness and harmony of all created things. A tender radiance suffuses all. That Raffael's eloquent small brush licks into life on the canvas; there is an awesome aureole of spiritual Presence. When an artist is as talented as Raffael it gives birth all over again to familiar theories of divine afflatus in painting because people cannot believe that a man can rise this far above other men.

All the same, in his teaching Raffael stressed stick-to-it-[iveness], regular hours in the studio, concentration, and work-energy. He would say that in art the end result was 90% steady application and only 10% talent and luck. Kindness was ever the touchstone of Raffael's teaching as whole; he could also be candid to a cold degree of cruelty when the situation demanded. There were students who had to hear that it was perhaps time to prepare a career outside art. In general, feelings were what Joseph emphasized with students: how to have a real feeling, how to keep it alive. Feelings were what he insisted for humanity which is the burden of every important artist's statement.

Late one afternoon I was sitting in the [O]ffice by myself when a phone message came in for Carlos Villa, an uncommonly popular teacher in a department of popular teachers. Carlos is a painter of powerful, rhythmically swirling abstractions, at once nonchalant and gutsy, to which he frequently attaches feathers, bones, bits of mirror, fetish-dolls, and spatters of blood and semen. They seem to have been painted not with the head but with his heart, liver, lungs, and viscera. Ultimately they derive from Jackson Pollock and Pollock's good friend, the painter Alphonso Ossorio – like Villa, a Filipino. But this derivation is by way of the more turgid, chthonic West Coast school of abstract expressionism which developed at the San Francisco Art Institute where Carlos Villa went to school. Villa's place in the history of painting in California is secure, and the précis of "Art Institute" brand AbEx might be given as Clifford Still, Frank Lobdell, Jack Jefferson, Carlos Villa, and the Future. Villa was hired at Sacramento State in the late sixties when a new chairman arrived and, to his bewilderment, found fully half the department was made up not just of WASPs like deWitt Jayne and Woody Witt, painter of slight but utterly charming pastorals, but of Professors like Vollbrecht, Herberholz, Else, Geis, Hohlwein, Beckmann, Walburg, Uhlin,

and Bohr, whose ancestor-folk skipped the trip to England and emigrated directly to the U.S. from Anglia, Saxony, Bavaria, Prussia, or whatever German canton. What's more, to this Nordic constellation the department was getting ready to add the illustrious and fantastical star of Stephen Kaltenbach and the bright, wandering comet of Kurt von Meier. Again with the collusion of Dean Harvey Reddick the department literally changed complexion in hardly more than two years' time with the addition to the roster of teachers like Carlos Villa, Allan Gordon, Oliver Jackson, Frank LePena, Al Wong, Grace [], Esteban Villa, Ed Carrillo, Jimmie Suzuki, and Jose Montoya.

This renovation did not take place at Sacramento State, any more than in the rest of our society, without certain stresses. But it did take place and it took place rapidly and with a common will toward thoroughgoing racial balance – for there was never at Sacramento, any question, as there has been at some universities, of “putting a black in the window,” as when Richard Randell was hired away from CSUS by S----- University in Palo Alto, CA. The new hiring at Sacramento expanded the department by about a third, to about thirty positions, and afterward everyone felt just as they knew they would when they were able to look around at a meeting and see artists, historians, and educators who represent, collectively, the dream in a democracy like ours of a fair chance for all.

In one domain of hiring the department's ideals still run well ahead of its practice, and this leaves us in a situation that perhaps the 80's will correct. Well over half our students in all areas of concentration, are women, yet, to the impoverishment of life in the department, they have few enough models on the distaff side of the faculty. We all know that whenever women do not carry the same weight as men hypocrisy is the result, whereas when men and women work together under conditions of equal responsibility things go better and there is a sweet humanization of the labor. Fortunately it is true at least that the women who have worked with us over the years are a distinguished lot, headed by Joan Brown, one of the most formidable contemporary painters, and including, from Art Ed, Lita Whitesel, Barbara Herberholz, and the innovative young artist Maria Winkler, not to forget the printmaking contingent: the ebullient, indelible, and quite [unduplicable] Sylvia Lark, Kathy Keller, and Christi Hager. I can testify that the art historians miss greatly the leaven provided when Susan McKillop and Sue Willoughby were helping out. And just in general all through the department the faculty's situation is roughly the obverse of the student's: Too much Yang and not enough Yin.

The obstacles which impede a wom[e]n in the arts are fairly similar to the difficulties encountered by professional women elsewhere in society. One could speak of all the CSUS women as de facto feminists, and Lita Whitesel's witty and irony-laced treatment of the treatment of women in art has been a bulwark of the Art Ed curriculum. Still, within the department at CSUS, there has been a thoughtful avoidance of doctrinaire theories about “women's art.” Joan Brown has often had to dissociate herself from crusaders seeking a figurehead, and one talented student, going to Gladys Nilsson for guidance about how to become a celebrated “woman artist,” was sent away kindly but finally with the observation “Art is made by people, sweetie.” This does not change the fact that neither Carlos Villa nor Irving Marcus nor Bob Else is a particularly possible model for the women students

who preponderate in their courses; nor, no matter how fascinating he may be in class, is Dr. Uhlin; nor am I in this respect, nor Dr. Bohr, nor Frank LaPena. More women teachers are needed. It is the department's only signal weakness.

The message for Carlos Villa was from a museum curator in New York. I decided to take it up to him in the painting studio upstairs where I knew Carlos and Raffael were teaching as a team. Carlos Villa grew up on the street in San Francisco along with other young men from his community and the time he wasn't just hanging out on the corner he spent in a pool hall. His parents were immigrants; they didn't speak much English, and Carlos' father washed floors for the telephone company for most of his life. This put Carlos through Catholic school, where the sisters got hold of him and, since he probably was cuter and brighter than a cherry tomato, they put books in his hands, taught him to read a little Latin, and saw to it that he had drawing materials. The rest, as I've said, is history, or art history, anyway. Carlos went to the Art Institute in San Francisco and, for his M.F.A., to Mills College where, to earn his scholarship, he was assistant to the late, legendary Dr. Alfred Neumeier. It's gratifying how many artists in the department are on a comfortable footing with the history of art. It's even more helpful, where departmental harmony and mutual understanding are concerned, that almost all the art educators and all the art historians have a hard personal acquaintance with the dues collected by serious art form anyone who is trying to make it. It is a glory, if that's not too strong a word, of our department that Dr. Allan Gordon, for instance, has had significant showing of his ritual-objects in museums while his courses in tribal art, say, or the history of modern architecture could be as readily taught by Oliver Jackson, by Gerald Walburg. This easy reciprocity is not the rule on every campus. At Berkeley (where Art Ed is so infra dig it doesn't even exist) the staid art historians moved away during the 70's from their former colleagues, the dirty old artists. Separate buildings, and after all these years! At our school the arts complex was worried out of the State Master Plan by such implacable harriers as Robert Else, Gerald Walburg and Don Herberholz. Money, equipment, and space have never been what they ought to be, but the operation goes on. It was the chance to expand, not intellectual policy, that led to a physical separation of studio workshops from history. On a rainy day at our school it's not too bad a walk, especially with a copy of the Daily Hornet held over your head, from the art history lecture room out to the Sculpture Lab by the levee. But at Harvard a psychic abyss yawns between art history headquarters in the Fogg and the lovely but preposterously tiny LeCorbusier building for practi[s]e-art. And in many other departments which look to Harvard and to Berkeley, art remains a poor cousin to its history. I remember a snowy evening in Madison about 10 years ago when I was about to give a public lecture on the work of my colleagues here and at Davis. Nixon had just done something flagrant in Southeast Asia and police were sweeping the campus to demonstrate to the demonstrators what the price of civil disobedience was going to be. I had to get from the art studio building over to the art lecture hall and when I glanced out the window I saw a locked-arms blue line of helmet-and-visored policemen standing between Art History and Art.

The consanguinity of art and art history has never been in doubt among historians at Sacramento but there have been moments when hearts went into mouths. There was the time I was standing in the hallway with my senior colleague, Dr. Riis Bohr, a cheerful, sensitive man, with something of an intellectual green thumb, but whose conservative mien thoroughly discourages any presumption or infringement of his scholarly space. So it was that I thought the one-for-all, all-for-one model department was a goner when a man wearing a [fuschia] shirt and black patent leather shoes sailed into the other end of the corridor and let out with, Hiya Riis, what's happening, Baby? Dr. Bohr looked, he peered, he squinted against the light from the glass doors. Then Bohr began to smile and his smile just widened on him. Riis went forward and received a hug from another culture. Then he disappeared into his office cubicle. I just stood there chagrined, as often we are when we fail to trust, when we suppress our natural tenderness, when we outsmart our innocence. I had failed to behave as an artist. Therefore I had not known. Riis and Carlos were friends!

Wherever they've taught neither Carlos Villa nor Eduardo Carrillo have spent much of their week away from some neighborhood arts project they fostering. Carrillo is one of a small group of Los Angeles painters from the same era at UCLA who in their work have ignored mainstream conventions – as most Los Angeles painters have not, preferring to produce a knowing and sleek revision of New York concerns. Ed grew up in East L.A. and he is far and away the most [skilfull] Chicano painter to come along, as well as the most sophisticated – though this wasn't enough to keep Ed out of the "Bad" Painting Show organized by Marcia Tucker to show the art world work considered to be irrelevant in New York. Ed is destined for enduring attention as a realist painter of our own period with something real to say, for once, about the time-space conjunction and other perennial subjects of 2-D art. There are those, and I am one of them, who think that Ed draws energy for his paintings from the cosmic stream of grace, and if you get down to the Crocker Museum to see the large Interior which hangs there, take a look at the rattlesnake ashtray on the dining room table at Ed's rented house on H St. and you will see a spiritual space ship for fair.

Now some people don't like to read about cosmic streams of grace and the like, and these readers heartily wish that artists would not be so adamant in debunking the worldview based on scientific rationalism. They find it hard to understand why our sometime colleague Jim Pomeroy, one of the best of the younger American artists, should have done a piece which cast into doubt the reality of the moon-landing. They don't get it, they don't get a lot of the art done in their time, and they won't get it either, if history provides an index for prediction. One time, on television, I saw one of the local newswomen interview Ed Carrillo at an opening at D.R. Wagner's gallery downtown. The newslady was wearing a girl's poplin raincoat and a pastel silk scarf; she looked very nice. Carrillo had on a serape over his white peon's pajamas. Where do you get the ideas for these paintings, he was asked. The lady meant that the paintings were strange. "Well, I receive messages from outer space," Ed said. He was choking back laughter and turning away to hide it. Don't your friends think you're crazy when you tell them you get messages from outer space? asked the not-so-dumb TV lady. Well, said Ed, when I get messages

from space I think I'm crazy! And he hid his face in his sombrero so as not to be caught laughing at another person.

It was a lovely stand-off. But the lady whose wish for herself was to interview, for television, people who can do things is not alone in her irritation with artists. Why don't they believe what other people believe, why are they forever meditating or fiddling with drugs, why should they always be mocking the official moralities which support social intercourse as we know it??? Above all, why do they have to make it so nauseating and hard to understand! Take Gerald Walburg, who is a pretty good sculptor, with reasonable pretensions to national standing. His art takes the well-travelled but still heroic route of welded-steel constructions in Cor-Ten, and his Indo-Arch commissioned by the City does just what it is supposed to do: it provides an exhilarating moment of beauty in a public place. The artist tried to make something legible, elegant, monumental, upward-thrusting, yet perfectly poised. He pretty well succeeded, too. In our time and place (and in many another place and time throughout the modern era) this success guaranteed that the artist's work would be savaged as "frivolous and ugly" (both!) by every ignoramus in town, including, in the present case, the woman, "an art major in college," who manages the newest and most hideous Holiday Inn, the most ignoble building ever designed, which only yesterday fell upon Sacramento in a gargantuan squat hard by Walburg's Indo-Arch. Of course, in a society which values a hotel, which provides jobs, and does not value sculpture, which provides pleasure and truth, this criticism is natural enough and, though it is one more nail in the coffin of alienation, can even be enjoyed by artists as just another sinister good joke. In the instance of Walburg and his detractors the best is yet to come, for as the censorious eye of our fellow-artist Gov. Reagan's once told him Walburg's principal motif in his art has always been his own genitals, which are near to hand and seldom out of any artist's mind, whether it is Claes Oldenburg or Judy Chicago, and which Gerry usually abstracts only lightly, as in the frivolous and ugly Indo-Arch, into a soaring counterpoint of straight line and arabesque. No one has, at this writing, made the connection, but people are bound to catch on sooner or later. Some things you have to wait for.

As for Carrillo, he was hired away by U.C. Santa Cruz where, as a gift to the community, he spent 8 months painting a mural in an unused entry off the enclosed shopping mall downtown. The painting dealt searchingly and compassionately with the theme of conquered and Conquistador, with the fateful coming together of brown and white peoples, their cultures, and their myths. The thing to keep in mind about this mural is its quality. Many artists considered it the finest mural outside Mexico. What the manager of the Santa Cruz branch of Monterey Savings and Loan, which owns the mall, thought of Ed's work was that Ed's work was kind of a big mess, and quite conceivably a blight on the mall and people's shopping instincts, so one day while Ed was away working on a mural for the City of Los Angeles the bank manager, in order "to clean the place up," had Ed's work [spraypainted] out with glossy enamel, thus earning himself a place in the annals of banker taste. Which is interchangeable with newscaster taste and, despite the best efforts of some art department, with hotel manager taste.

So Ed Carrillo lost a great painting. And the Santa Cruz area lost a valuable public asset, all in a day's blindness. It would take more than a day for a bank to destroy Carrillo's proudest accomplishment in art, however. For this was not a great painting but a great action, such as few men have the grace to perform. On the strength of this action and not on the merit of his paintings Carrillo was hired to teach at Sacramento.

Back in the 60's Ed and his wife were living down in La Paz, Baja California. People in La Paz have very little, almost nothing, yet they were importing items from the Guadalajara Market in order to have something to sell to the American tourists. It helped that Ed was able to get a grant from the Mexican government and it helped that Ed's uncle was Chief of Police in La Paz. On a vacant lot on the road to the airport Ed went to work. For and with poor people he built a crafts and art Center from the ground up, with everyone learning what had to be learned as they went along. This Center took dozens of nearly destitute men, women, and children literally off the street and gave them back skills they had not known they had lost. The smallest craft object from Mexico, like a [handpainted] tie, or even an ashtray, can be memorable for its charm, and today the operation the Carrillos started in La Paz is strongly self-sustaining. It was a fine achievement all around, although I should perhaps label it Ed's humblest accomplishment in art since, even though artists are not saints – particularly not our bunch, any of the same paradoxes do operate in their lives nevertheless.

Here at home in Sacramento the task of collecting community consciousness fell to Esteban Villa and Jose Montoya, founders, along with a few friends, of the Centro which serves the Latino community downtown and of its affiliated RCAF workshop which produces murals and posters designed to raise political and cultural consciousness. Esteban Villa is an artist who seemingly grew right out of the soil of the Central Valley; in his hands (and closely followed by a host of adherents) the Chicano poster makes a strong, immediate visual impact with its flat, vivacious color statement, its interlocking clean-edged shapes stylized from pre-Colombian motifs and its airy but sure reconnaissance of the history of the modern poster from the days of Jugendstil and the Nabis on up through the Soviet ideological poster and on to the optical [zappiness] of the Haight-[Ashberry] rock poster which is the RCAF's product's closest antecedent.

Jose Montoya put together the Pachuco Show, and at first it appeared to be merely a hologram of a couple dancing, supported by small paintings of Pachucos by Jose and his friends, plus all kind of memorabilia of this 40's era of confrontation between Chicano street youth and harassing bands of servicemen, sailors mostly, who were egged on by the newspapers and radio, whose interest always lies in hysteria, and who were supported, whenever it came to trouble, by the police.

Taken one at a time the old photos of cars and teen-angels, the yellowed yellow journalism which stirred "decent" citizens against the Brown Menace, are not particularly prepossessing. Seen as an ensemble, however, the gestalt takes over; one begins to see that the exhibition is a single work of art – an installation piece, in fact, and not far removed in spirit from such advanced contemporary work as Jim Pomeroy's vast ironic Bicentennial

tribute to Mt. Rushmore. In Pomeroy's installation the piles of tacky tourist trash and kitsch images spawned by the Rushmore theme agglomerate to expose the second-rate character of this national "monument;" what comes slowly to light as one takes it all in is the overblown, fake-heroic, quasi-fascist aspect to Borghlum's hackwork tour de force. While Pomeroy takes aim at what is dead-conventional in our experience – the [campertrucks] lined up in the immense Rushmore parking lot, the [parkranger's] President's lecture, Montoy's piece manages to resurrect an attitude of the late 40's and 50's – Pachuco dandyism, whose one goal, during the deadest episode in American spiritual history, was to remain alive and defiant in despite of authoritarian pressures to conform. Pachuco-ism was a way, the only way, for a Mexican-American to bear witness. It was not, as perfectly malicious newspaper articles asserted, a murderous freak-show let loose upon an innocent America. Willy-nilly each [p]achuco became, by his stance, what today we might call a performance-artist.

The evening of the gallery opening I went early because I have a long drive home to Pilot Hill and besides I didn't want to get shut out of the Mexican food and beer they were planning to serve as part of the vernissage ritual which reveals so much about the relation of Culture and Art to Nature. It was very impressive (and it spilled the opening out into the sidewalk) when hundreds and hundreds of people showed up in full-fig Pachuco attire – zoot suits for the men, the women in period dresses and hairdos. After about an hour of milling around there was a moment of sustained clarity when the relationship of style to identity was as apparent to me as it has ever been. It was very impressive, the hundreds of people, the whole thing.

Then thousands of people showed up. Jose's first event strayed into the street, there was nowhere else to go. First one motorcycle cop, then teams of them began to cruise a scene that was lurid, apparitional. The cops were absolutely ignored, which was just as well from their point of view. I conjecture that the police were in Condition 7-11, an imaginary Condition where the Unforeseen has just merged with the unthinkable and it's happening right now before you have time to doubt it. Condition 7-11 in this case being the fact that 2000 Pachucos and their ladies are apparently drinking wine in the middle of J St. and having one hell of a Friday evening.

There are ironies built into the RCAF situation, the salient one being that they are a clubby reverse-elite and can be as stuffy and one-dimensional as the next outfit with too many generals. But they have created art where before there was none; and in the process they rescued an art form – the poster – that, after the sixties, was about to be shoved in the closet once again and they gave this medium of communication an energy that will last while notions of brotherhood, cultural identity, and economic fair-play are still with us. Even so, out on Highway 50 going home from the art opening I couldn't help dwelling on the irony that Montoya, with his deliberate aloofness from any and all modernist ploys was looking on this occasion very much like not only X the well-known New York-based installation artist but also like Y the popular West Coast performance artist.

The Pachuco show still strikes me as a very special performance action by an artist with something special to say. Very much I was reminded of the gigantic reception afforded the S.F. Art Institute's Other Sources exhibition organized by Carlos Villa and including third-world artists like Gordon, Jackson, LaPena, Montoya, and that peregrine "little master" of 20th century idioms, the painter James Suzuki. That opening lasted three days' worth of dancing, feasting, and general celebration. Whenever there is a triumphant opening we seem to get a glimpse of the heights in the very pleasure people take in seeing each other, renewing friendships, exchanging promises, and making plans in an atmosphere of beauty and spiritual achievement. I can remember the grand opening of the Thiebaud exhibition at the Crocker Museum when thousands of jubilant citizens, far more than I can recall seeing at an opening in any institution of the Crocker's drawing power, came through elbow to elbow in tribute to Sacramento's first son, and Sacramento State's most distinguished alumnus, and one of the world's greatest painters, whose dignity and decency, greater than other men's, can be read in his every earnest brushstroke. But, although there was love in the air, [allright], mostly these [Sacramentans] came in the spirit of fans gathering to pay homage to one of their own who had managed to rise far above them, as far as a great athlete, a movie star, a master criminal, a scientific genius, or in this case simply as far as millionaire artist who had done something, those pies, those opulent cupcakes, that they couldn't quite fasten on the meaning of, but that they knew was somehow great. The people who came to the Pachuco Show were equally innocent of any true art-awareness, but they had a better sense of why they were there: to honor each other and to remind themselves of the meaning of their lives. Ed Carrillo's friend Roberto Chavez told me that after the Pachuco Show opened in his barrio space in East L.A. that people came in with their own photos and mementoes saved from the era and just pinned them up on the walls alongside the rest of the exhibition. The Pachuco Show was very impressive. And it was a good time.

As the artist is society's bad boy, so ceramics is the bad boy of the art world. Around ceramics there lingers an aura of not-quite-respectability. In New York City only 32 or 41 or 17 people have so far found out about ceramics. Ceramics in New York has the status of pottery. Ceramics is 12 plates and cups for Aunt Agatha and Uncle Buz. New York hopes it will not have to learn about the ceramics thrown and hand-built in Sacramento, California where, needless to say, ceramics is major art fare.

The slight disreputability suffered, or, if you will, enjoyed by ceramics is a tenacious hangover from the Renaissance prejudice, old in Michelangelo's day, which preferred Painting to Sculpture on the ground that 2-D art is more ethereal, less palpable and gross, less material than 3-D work. And hence more philosophical, more capable of giving expression to the spiritual realities art is always "about." Michelangelo, ever defiant of norms and of the supposed legitimacy of authority, took it on himself to defend the role of the sculptor, that disheveled fellow with his hair stuck full of wood-shavings, his clothes caked with marble dust, his shoes webbed with wax-drippings, his hands chapped and stained from daily manual labor. Can it be that this cagey disheveled person has survived these many centuries and who knows how many efforts to clean him up and dry him out in order to turn up in the

guise of a professor who professes clay under the name, say, of Peter Vandenberg, and genius Dutchman and van Gogh look-a-like? Or professes clay under the bright name of Robert Brady, sadly smiling through a thick cloud of dust and not being able to do anything with this hands that does not come out more beautiful than the last. Or professes clay under the perky [goatherd] lady name of Donna Billick whose tall, standing Kaoliths look beautifully wacky from one angle and when you walk around to the other side, well, they look wackily beautiful. Now all this takes place in Sacramento under the wise aegis of Ruth Rippon, an artist who is herself synonymous with the historical development of ceramics art on the West Coast, which is the main place, when you think about it, where ceramics has really developed at all. Under Ruth's direction facilities have expanded, there has been a flowering of ceramics workshops of every conceivable kind, and numerous talents have sprung up, which is all the more amazing to the art historians among us, to whom the ceramics major, his eyes cast down upon gross earth, his mind bent low and more bound to primal matter than even the sculptor, his heart only happy when up to this elbows in slip, appears as a special kind of nut (and the hardest to crack). In the art history lecture room the ceramics student sits listlessly in the back of the class and looks in wonder at the object on the student's desk next to him. It is a book. The ceramics student wishes the clock would hurry, wishes there would be a power-failure, wishes the teacher would have a heart-attack. The ceramics student would like to go back to pounding clay. From sweatshirt to shoes the ceramics student is covered with the magnificence of mud.

And now we are back at the central paradox in this matter of why there should be a department of art in a University at all. Because from this mud, in the sensitive hands of Bob Brady, the powerful hands of Peter Vandenberg, arise objects of art which will continue to be valued and studied long after the submergence of our own emerging University. Brady, like Vandenberg, was seasoned in Robert Arneson's fruitful workshop in Davis. The quality of Brady's giant, yet fragile urns, extrapolated from tribal motifs, and infused with pathos as well as humor, is indicative of the major role he will play in American art of the next decades. As for Vandenberg there is simply no telling how good he is. With the exception of Pete Voukos whose leadership of the California school of ceramics dates from the days way back when time began (but only a couple of decades ago as humans measure) when Voukos and Ruth Rippon and a very few others were mauling the clay alongside each other at Oakland's Arts and Crafts, with this single exception of Voukos, Peter Vandenberg must be credited with the greatest natural gift for form-finding of any artist working in clay. When Brady recently turned for inspiration to African masks, Peter followed suit creating a series of outside, free-standing heads based on his own revision of Modigliani's revision of Baule work. They answer the question whether profound human feeling can be translated into clay and the question why Vandenberg is so [underrecognized] in the art world is being rendered moot just now by the Everson Museum's important circulating show of American ceramics of the last hundred years: 20 artists, including Vandenberg, Arneson, Voukos, and Dave Gilhooley (whose charmingly priapic ceramic frogs have turned out to be museum-domesticated all over the world and who has recently been teaching a class with us whenever he can). The youngest artist in the Hundred Years show Tom Rippon, is Ruth's nephew. Rippon never enrolled at Sac State

or at Davis either – he just “hung out.” But we count him because he is awfully good and, same story, we count too the excellent national-class abstract painter John Ford, one of the best artists under thirty.

Why so many good artists showed up at CSUS in the early 70’s has something to do with the historical circumstances. Raffael and I were visiting professors at Berkeley one summer later in the 60’s, a time when the University, faced with mounting daily violence over the immorality of racism and the Vietnam War, had been forced to relinquish its authority to police. Understandably, its moral authority was soon hard to find. The students there were so beaten down and beaten up that no constructive thing could take place in the classroom. Going to school was just a holding action. Kids brought their dogs and sat around. In the Fall Joseph and I left gladly for Sacramento where you could talk to students without being drowned out by a helicopter. Other teachers came or were already here for roughly the same reason. Once here they looked around, saw each other, and stayed a few years. There ensued what by any objective standard has to be called a Golden Age of creative activity at our school and in the surrounding art community. Six or seven of the very best artists in this country would be sitting in a curriculum meeting talking about how to get the off-set press rolling and preparing to drop in on a student opening. The place glowed because, I’ll say again, the best teachers have the most to teach.

After a while some artists got too rich to teach anymore (Holden Caulfield was right: you can’t room comfortably with someone whose suitcases are not as good as yours). So they quit and pretty soon others moved away or went back to where they came from and before long the blood ox in the department had virtually been transfused. The situation now, still looks good to me, to Don Herberholz, to Bill Allan, to most of us who have now been here for some time. There is a young chairman (who is treating his whole administrative task as a piece of performance art), there are enthusiastic, young, and improving artists and teachers like Mike Riegel, Kathy Keller and Maria Winkler, not to mention such enthusiastic, still-young-for-an-artist up and comers like Ellen van Fleet, Oliver Jackson and Roger Vail who are heard of now and again on the national scene.

Nor to forget the grizzled but not-out-of-it-yet figures of Irv Marcus and Jack Ogden, keeping their art within striking distance of the main chance, involved as always throughout their careers with a sort of dialectical exchange of painting ideas, and teaching better than ever now with the curveball, slider and change of pace. In fact no one is out of it, including the semi-retired Bob Else, doyen of the department and long its teaching mainstay, although for most of those years Else was a tight an [ungratiating] painter, his facture stingy, his drawing crabbed. Recently in a local show I saw two landscapes Else had done of the same scene – the view of the Sacramento Valley you get as you look below from the first great hill on [hiway] 50. In both paintings Else had treated the rolling golden foothills as metaphors for the body and its soft contours. This transcription comes across as lurid and cramped in the earlier painting, done a dozen years ago just before the art stars invaded the Sacramento faculty. In the painting done last year the same idea is stated far more luxuriantly (yet with Else' characteristic economy); the color sings a little, and the tension between erotic menace and erotic desire is finely sustained. There can be no question that the older teacher was challenged to play for higher stakes in his art. He had the courage not to fold. A few others did seem to fold. They moved away or they went mad or they pursued a penchant for bad luck all the way unto early death. It is such sad losses that art exists to ameliorate.

One Sunday afternoon a few months ago I drove down to attend a ceremony at which the main Art Gallery on campus, hitherto anonymous, was renamed the Robert Else Gallery. This had been the idea of a chairman some years back and with unanimous approval of the department its time had now come. When I got there a lot of famous and not so famous artists were standing around talking and a crowd of Bob's current students was knocking back the hors d'oeuvres. Everybody was reminiscing like crazy and reading the messages from out-of-state and saying stuff like Bob Else taught them to make a [stretcherbar] and if they were going to school now they probably wouldn't know how to clean a brush because all teachers nowadays want to do is sit around and tell the same stories their N.Y. dealer tells and send out for pizza. It was one student's 19th birthday and she was crying and saying how glad she was for Dr. Else and she thought this was the best birthday she had had yet, and everybody was pretty happy and pretty sad and Bob Else cried too when artist after artist got up to say thanks. Bob Else is not a doctor of any description whatever but he is often called Dr. by those who don't know better and sometimes by those who do because he looks like a professor and not like a seedy good-for-nothing like many in the department – for instance that former chairman just mentioned. Bob himself realizes that to a certain extent he [Sac-rificed] his art to the perfection of his teaching and to the endless demands – reports, committees, meeting – of an expanding University. To the definition we have set up – that the best artists make the best teachers, [must] on Else's evidence be added the codicil that the great teacher is the teacher who gets results and in the case of Else this means that he must be accounted quite a teacher indeed. And, ergo, quite an artist.

Else must be accounted quite an artist because the artists who said thanks and the ones who sent messages were students at Sacramento State College in the days when Bob Else was the painting department and the roster of their names makes surprising reading since it suggests that when the art stars took over in the 70's

they inherited a tradition most of them were unaware of. In the late 50's and early 60's CSUS produced more really good painters than any other public university, including UCD its (literally) nearest rival. Taken together, the Sac State and Davis graduates rank above any two public universities you would care to name, and stand equal to the combined artistic output of the Art Institutes of San Francisco and Chicago. Only the Yale School of Fine Arts, which for two decades has stimulated the New York art scene like no other institution, deserves serious comparison with Davis-Sacto State. What this means is that if you are standing in the St. Louis Art Museum or the Milwaukee Art Center or the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis or in any of the good museums in West Germany you will be able to see paintings by Wayne Thiebaud, Mel Ramos, Ralph Goings, Fritz Scholder, Frank Owen; or at least you will see the spot on the wall that's pending for any of these painters who happen to be temporarily absent. And there is a good second echelon of artists, headed perhaps by Ken Waterstreet, standing right behind the first team and ready to knock on every museum door.

Artists in New York do not teach, except marginally; teaching is in a sense a non-N.Y. thing; and the history of American art education is a history of either defiance of the N.Y. art establishment or of co-optation by it. That is why a history of a department like ours can have some significance beyond the [fertile crescent] between the Sacramento and American rivers. Artists need the resistance (and the support) of other artists' personalities and they need the confrontation and the confirmation that other people's art provides. In the great art centers of the past and present: Rome, Paris, and now New York, this encounter is available on walking across the street. You will see three artists you know and two you don't know but would be glad if you did, and you will probably turn right around and go back to your studio fortified by a little gossip, energized by a flash of jealousy, inspired by Frank Stella get into a cab, and utterly forgetful of the cat litter you went out for in the first place.

To get into the kind of elbow rubbing that was going on at Sacramento State in the 70's most teachers had to get up in the morning and drive 50 or even 100 miles from some sylvan outpost. This is not the same thing as taking a cab and somehow the very outrageousness of these California distances made it more worthwhile to be there facing the other artists in the countless formal and informal meetings of a week at school. A [pleasureable] aura of [comeraderie] enveloped a department that had not long before been tense litigious, and factionalized. A spirit of criticism made the air healthy and the presence of major artists revealed the old office quarrels in all their silliness and superficiality. There were better things to do. Friendships flourished in the department and so did temporary animosities of the aesthetic kind. It is the hardest thing to like somebody who doesn't like your work. But even where there was animosity there was respect. Thus on Monday/Wednesday Jim Nutt didn't think much of Joseph Raffael and on Tu/Th it was the other way around. But on Friday, at the meeting to review graduate applications, each remembered who the other artist was. Fridays, too, there were regularly visitors from the [artworld] at large, an enrichment made possible by an Artists & Critics grant garnered by the Natl. Endowment by a former chairman and renewed in all succeeding years. In New York I've often heard the complaint that it was easier to get a museum curator to visit a studio in Sacramento than to go downtown to an artist's loft in SoHo.

That's very nice from where we sit but unfortunately the New York [artworld] is so insular, so self-referential, and so immersed in what can only be called neighborhood art gossip that, when Sacramento art or any [auslander] work at all, actually does manage to make an appearance where it counts, it's liable to go practically unrecognized. No less that 5 Sacramento State teachers have been accorded one-person show at the Whitney Museum: Stephen Kaltenbach, Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Bill Allan, Joan Moment. It is a real honor. Yet for all the notice taken of these exhibitions in New York itself you would hardly know they had been up at all. In this [the outlandish paintings] regard Joan Moment holds the world record for invisibility. Orchestrated in lambent clear hues and set daringly into an opaque black ground the stylized shapes of Joan's paradise gardens are drawn from the most diverse [arthistorical] sources: Roman mosaics, tribal bark paintings, 19th century American samplers. They are startling in their freshness of seeing and their dramatic unification of such unusual motifs. They were seen or rather they were not seen in Joan's one-woman show at the Whitney, which was ignored by the N.Y. Times, not covered by any other N.Y. paper, and completely overlooked by every one of so-called [the] National art magazines which are all published in New York. It was a phantom show. None of my acquaintance in New York was able to tell me he had seen Joan's show and the prominent critic Lawrence Alloway dismissed it, saying [O] that's just Marcia Tucker's Sacramento connection! The same day a very noted and not unsympathetic New York artist told me that such shows as Joan's were throwaways by the Whitney, mere sops to the provincial hinterlands, and not intended to be taken seriously by the people who matter. Similar treatment has befallen Steven Kaltenbach, an artist who career would appear to be a procession of honors. Like an extraordinary number of our colleagues Steve has received the coveted National Endowment grant to artists. Just recently he has not been completely well and has been living on the proceeds of a Guggenheim. Neither of these awards has convinced someone like Maurice Tuchman of the New York-oriented Los Angeles Museum to exhibit Steve's colossal, deeply pious Portrait of My Father, a project he worked on steadily for most of the decade. Kaltenbach's portrayal of this hoary elder contemplating eternity with his dying gaze has proven to be a contemporary painting for one easily accessible to anyone with eyes and a father. Yet the work obeys every sophisticated [moderist] canon for picture-making, through its flashy rebounding from depth to surface and its rigorous all-over patterning. The painting is not without macabre elements which add to its fascination. Presented at majestic scale, yet without bombast, Steve's Father provides a prime instance of that equipoise between pity and terror which add up in art to the Gothic Sublime. When it was unveiled at the Crocker Museum people gasped. They went home and brought their parents. Elderly women cried. Teenagers stood mute. People came to marvel and they came again and again.

Need I say that no New York museum will touch this painting by an artist who went to New York straight out of the Davis graduate school and made an immediate success through his imaginative forays into art politics. Kaltenbach covered the [artworld] with legends like TRIP, TEACH ART, START A RUMOR, BUILD A REPUTATION, which appeared as unsigned ads in the most prestigious art magazine. One such advertisement read BECOME A LEGEND. He did. Museum shows in Germany and Japan and New York soon followed and Kaltenbach was

[established] as one of the 3 or 4 most important pioneers of the conceptual movement in art. Then Kaltenbach committed a serious crime. He left New York for the West Coast. In a year or two he was forgotten.

If it weren't for the intervention of influential friends like Joseph Raffael, who has good reason to recognize a masterpiece, it is doubtful that even a few California museums would have picked up the painting. Museums are suspicious of work with a popular appeal. They are nervous about their roles as guardians of taste. They do not want to be caught with kitsch on the wall. [It is] easier when they can show work which has been seen first in New York. A good place to reach museum curators is where they are staying at their friend's place in New York. Your typical curator was not born yesterday. He is not a dummy like the callow Roger Clisby of our own Crocker Museum who did not need a second, third, fourth or tenth prompting to show Steve's painting, but embraced the idea right away. Clisby simply did not have whatever it takes to know whether a work is bad or good before he goes to the trouble of looking at it. So Clisby demonstrably lacks a skill which is highly developed in New York (and among famous artists as well as curators) and which is widely imitated elsewhere: he is a failure at judging art before he sees it. Clisby has not yet understood that it is more than a little suspicious and more than a little criminal when a highly successful artist deserts New York for Sacramento.

It is just plain crazy.

The mistake for artists out here would be to suppose that New York art circles are someday going to slow down the merry-go-round long enough to pay heed to what has been going on in a place like Sacramento. The present-day New York artist looks toward the formal aspects of Cubism and Fauvism for a point d'appui to launch his work, as he imagines, forward. Whereas artists here, and in Chicago, artists tend to look for historical support from Surrealism, with its depreciation of formal "issues" and its emphasis on the possibility of transforming life through art. Artists looking around them in New York just cannot believe in millenarian possibilities. They see too much garbage in the way. For them art has to be about art itself and art itself is understood as an escape-world from a reality that is beyond man's power to transform, or rather to restore, to the image of God's love and human kindness. But hereabouts, where the studio door is unlocked and birds sing in the garden outside, art is not done for art's sake, and the notion that art can affect life endures, and the sense that it is still possible to recapture the wonder we felt as children and to accept the risks of taking some things on faith. Christmas tree lights do not appear in a Bill Allan painting, in a Kaltenbach performance-piece for nothing. But even when the outlook is pessimistic and cynical, as in Nutt or Albertson, or sardonic, as in Marcus, there is still the intimation that man's inhumanity remains open to correction, that man's behavior is worth bothering about, that the human heart is infinitely malleable – for good, or for evil. New York is ignorant about all this and wants to stay ignorant. New York wonders what this has to do with making a picture about making a picture. New York wonders when the message that all is done for the sake of art will reach the provinces. By and large the best New York painting has a certain classiness to it. It runs to a tasteful, fey, perfumed elegance of statement and exists in complete contrast to the way art is done in California or Chicago where work so often comes across [as] crudely vital, obstreperously

anti-formal, and funky-ugly-vital. I was in New York the week the Extraordinary Realities Exhibition opened at the Whitney in 1973 – about 50 artists, nationwide, including Wiley and de Forrest from Davis along with Bill Allan, represented by a large neo-surrealist canvas, and the recent Sac State graduates Suzanne Adan and Nate Shiner. All in all it was our kind of show and I recall the glee I took in telling friends how bad Hilton Kramer was going to pan it in the Times come Sunday. Come Sunday, sure enough, Kramer wrote the whole show off as eclectic trash. He said it was the worst show in memory to appear in a local museum. He praised only H.C. Westermann, an artist who has influenced the Hairy Who, and Roy de Forrest, a happy “Marx Brothers Fauvist” whose playful innocence Kramer was at pains to contrast with the vicious banality of “a certain Arthur Schade,” listed from Madison, Wisc., and the perpetrator of a forest-animals scene called Smokin’, an awkwardly shaped acrylic painting on plastic which depicts a bear in Smoky the Ranger [costume] humping a [bunnyrabbit] girl bent forwards over a tree stump. This affront to taste Kramer could not stomach, so he wrote one of those classic Sacred Museum Duty to Public/Do They Really Call This Art? reviews that are so savored in later years when many of the artists in the show are safely famous and are seen to have been working for beauty, the truth about things, and the public good all along.

Month after month, year after year, in publication from writers who are themselves part of the scene we learn about the minutest shifts in the direction of New York art, whereas there is no comparable information on about what is taking place Outside New York. It is not bad itself that we have these New York minutiae available to us, it’s just that a terrible imbalance resulted, and the artwork is top-heavy with news about New York. What Hilton Kramer or any other New York critic wouldn’t know is that Art Schade was Roy de Forrest’s teaching assistant at Davis and that the two men are very best of friends. Art taught with us briefly before skipping over to Madison and while Art was here Jim Nutt’s presence rubbed off on his art a little. Schade is an uproarious fellow who would pull the leg of a one-legged man. He added life around here and he used his art to send-up and to take-down – but always with a dash of [goodhumor].

What happened to Schade’s painting, by the way, is as follows: a) a Princess living in New York purchased the work for her collection; b) Lawyers for various women’s groups said they were going to sue the Whitney because Arthur’s painting was sexist and put women or at least [rabbitwomen] in a bad light; c) the Museum said go ahead, blah, blah, artists right to free expression, nothing going to make them censor their show, etc.; d) the U.S. Forest Service’s lawyers threatened to file suit against the Whitney, Art Schade, and the painting’s owner on the ground that Art’s bear looked and dressed exactly like their copyrighted bear Smoky and tended to ridicule and defame etc., etc.; e) the Whitney withdrew the painting; f) the Princess’, having seen enough, reneged on her decision to buy; g) Art Schade decided to sue somebody or everybody and contacted a lawyer, only to find out h) how much it was probably going to cost him! so that i) Art finally decided he would “sit around home and fart at the moon.”

Hilton Kramer simply didn't have the basic information to enable him to see that Art's painting looked to Nutt for some of its formal strategies – the use of [plexiglass] as a support, the garish colors – or that Art's painting amounts to a cartoonish send-up of his mentor's (de Forrest's) childlike – and apparently sex-free – bestiaries. New York ignorance of the endemic context of our work has stood in the way of a fair evaluation of our achievement for as long as I can remember. The conclusion to be drawn is that Sacramento art, Northern California art, the art produced Outside New York in general, must go their own ways in the effort to construct a tradition which speaks to our experience of reality and which conforms to the reality of our desires rather than to the code of rules which govern picture-making. This message was on the walls recently when Joseph Raffael was offered a big retrospective. He chose to call it The California Years and the exhibit travelled to museums in Western states only.

Raffael was there at a meeting I remember shortly after I came to Sacramento State. The agenda got around to the question whether we should send a representative to the opening of a big, mostly figurative show the Whitney was then mounting – about 75 works by Americans, covering the period 1940 to the present. Thirteen of these works were by artists sitting at the table. Perhaps we ought to have someone at the opening? Someone pointed out that the Whitney was originally going to call the show Human Grotesques but that this was felt to be too strong and that the exhibition was now going to be titled Human Concern and Personal Torment. I remarked that I doubted New York was ready for such a show. The climate in the [artworld] was too cynical to be receptive, I said. Gerald Walburg said, They're going to hate it all right! I hear artists are calling the show The Agony and the Ecstasy!

And everyone laughed.

Jim Nutt didn't laugh. Jim Nutt said, That isn't funny.

We were all quiet. Jim Nutt was right: human suffering isn't funny.

When the message from New York came in for Carlos Villa I was alone in the Office nursing my wounds from an argument I had just lost to Robert Nelson, who has the very closest friendships with Bill Allan and with William Wiley, [the] very wonderful artist who taught for many years at Davis but eventually got too successful, started staring at the ceiling in class, and quit. Bob Nelson is an "underground" filmmaker, perhaps the most gifted, certainly the funniest, on the West Coast. He is a 1st Prize winner at the Cannes Festival for his short O Dem Watermelons and he is a fairly good painter, out of the same S.F. Art Institute bag that produced Carlos Villa. Fortunately for me Nelson is a man who does not argue for money. I have never won an argument from Bob, although we have argued off and on for years while he was teaching film for us. I had just read here: Yale hires teachers with paint on their shoes, Yale spends the money on facilities, Yale tolerates a little disorder and craziness, there is primacy of art over history at Yale, contemporary art is a major feature of the exhibition

schedule, Yale's alumni and alumnae dominate the new generation of artists in New York, and so on. How Nelson ever beat me on this I [can't] even recall, he just got the needle in me and then he quit while he was temporarily ahead. Nelson isn't really like Dr. Samuel Johnson since, to tell the truth, he is a semi-educated, ungrammatical lout and he has never even heard of Johnson; but like Dr. Johnson Nelson will argue against anything you might say. He argues for the sheer pleasure of contradicting. If you say, Well, Nelson, I believe art is about human suffering and exaltation, Nelson will deny it and he will soon prove art is about turkey droppings. The only way I ever get the best of him momentarily is to trick him. If, off-handedly, I say, hmmm, Nelson, I don't believe it is actually true that wild-flowers spring up under his boots wherever Bill Wiley walks, Nelson will bristle, stand up very tall, look down on me and say [O] yeah? before he realizes I am having him on. Nelson is no longer with us because he [is] called to make movies and he couldn't pay the bills on the Cal State salaries so he had to take a position with a large Midwestern university that wanted to hire a star.

I finally went upstairs with the note for Carlos and was starting in the studio door when a tall and skinny young man burst through it weeping and sobbing and pulling at his long hair with his long arms. I stood there astonished, speechless, dismayed, as he went to balcony railing and doubled himself over it crying and crying and heaving up sighs from his guts. I recognized this boy. He was a quite promising student and one that I can now say has begun to show up in exhibitions. All I could do on that afternoon almost 10 years ago was to stand there staring at somebody turn himself inside out. He was blind with tears, couldn't see me or anything else, and he would not be comforted.

I went right in the classroom and looked around for Carlos. There he was over at a corner easel looking over a girl's painting in progress. I hurried over and saw that Raffael was standing there, too. The two of them were commenting on the work in front of them, and the girl was placid, wide-awake, listening. I was all wrought-up and they were as calm as an English lawn. I could hardly talk. Joseph, I got out, Carlos!

Yes?

What is God's name is going on?? There's a kid out there bawling his heart out. He just came out of this room! I was pointing at the door. What the hell are you guys doing in here!

Carlos looked vague. Joseph, interrupted, looked even more vaguely at the door.

There's a kid out there, I said. He's crying himself silly out on the balcony. WHAT IS WRONG??

Carlos turned to the student's easel, half-annoyed but patient. He said something to the girl about halo green. To [he] said, That must be _____.

Carlos and I just gave him a critique, explained Raffael in a voice which has only a little New York left in it. He picked up the girl's brush, hesitated, and handed it to Carlos Villa. Villa squinted at the canvas, then stepped back for a moment. Raffael was gazing at the easel, but both eyes were unfocused, inward.

Listen, Carlos, I said. Listen, Joseph. Somebody's out there and he is going through something pretty bad. Is that your idea of a critique!

Well, John, said Carlos. He stepped in and dug 3 or 4 times into one area of the painting with the handle of the brush. Well, if _____ is an artist this is going to be very good for him, Carlos Villa said.

And, said Raffael, again concentrating on the canvas: if he is not an artist.....