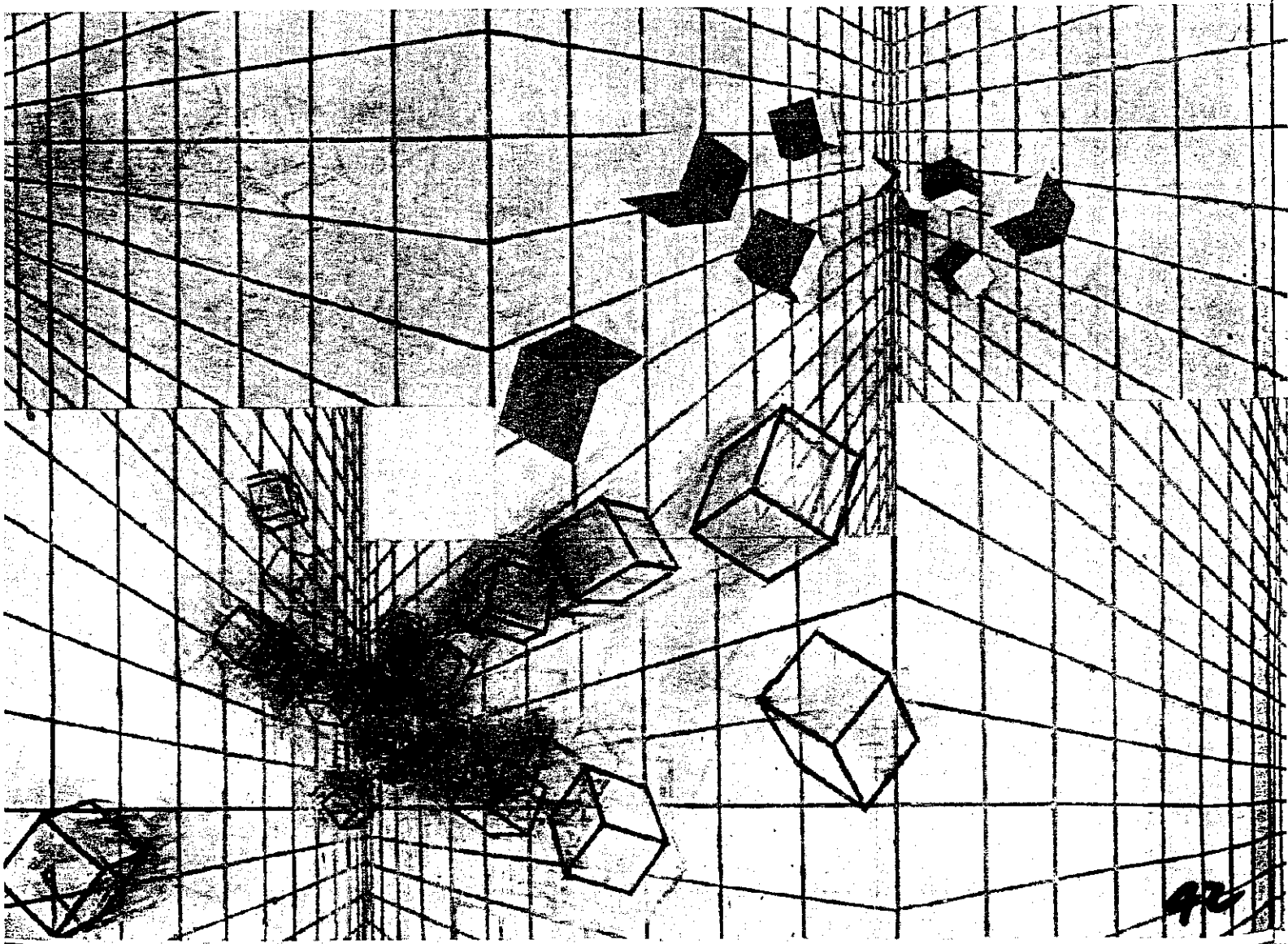


The Workmanship of Risk:

The Re-emergence of Handcraft in



Pierre Cabanne: "What is the cerebral genesis of the 'Large Glass'?"
 Marcel Duchamp: "I don't know. These things are often technical."
 Cabanne: "It's odd that you, who are taken for a purely cerebral painter, have always been preoccupied with technical problems."
 Duchamp: "Yes. You know, a painter is always a sort of craftsman."¹

Postmodern Art

by Polly Uirlich

Craftsmanship is "a word to start an argument with."
 -British crafts theorist David Pye²

"Art is shaping."
 -Joseph Beuys³

Conceptualism, Bochner, for example, uses his paintings to address philosophical issues as dense as any he worked on in the '60s, primarily by recording—via brushstrokes made by hand—the mental processes that go into making art. "Post-Pop, Post-Pictures" show at the David and Alfred Smart Museum in Chicago, points out that while younger artists such as Michelle Grabner, John Pomara, and David Sztranski produce shimmering, compact surfaces, their work still speaks to Conceptual and Postmodern themes, and is not a regressive revisiting of Modernist purity and formalism.⁸

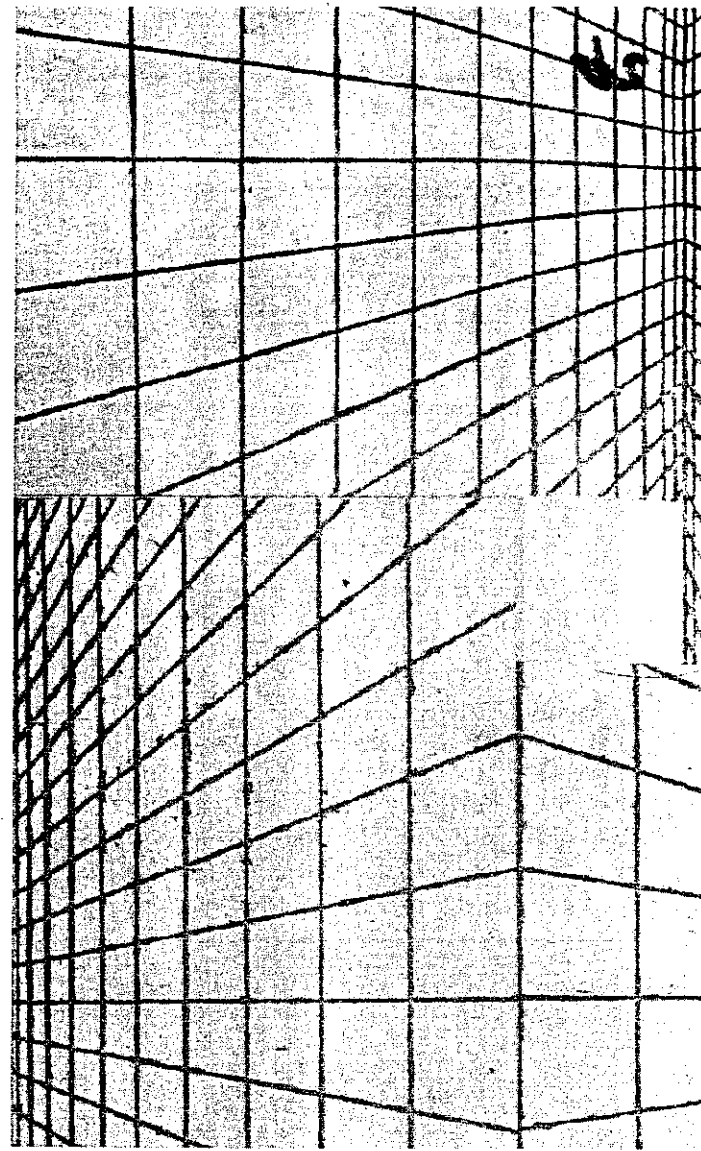
How can the handcrafts in art be "radical"? In some circles, the terms seem mutually exclusive. Actually, the synthesis of hand facture and Postmodernism has roots in the nineteenth century with the invention of photography, when it became clear that mimesis was no longer the primary function of art. The emphasis on art-works as special, handmade, precious objects conveying a peculiar, individual power, rather than as attempts to replicate reality, began to take hold. The handcraftiness of fine-art objects, downplayed since the Renaissance in an effort to distance them from less prestigious handcrafted objects such as pottery or textiles, gained new respect. Now, with the Postmodern blending and leveling of categories, art and craft have edged closer toward an acknowledged, and not shameful, union. But more than that, the increasing status of handcraftsmanship—and the issues surrounding it—in art suggests some basic philosophical and aesthetic tenets in the West. Handcrafts, with their relation to the body and the physical senses, counteract the drive toward technology and dematerialization in our culture. The traditional identification of handcrafts with minorities and women, too, allows these processes to reveal alternative voices. Critic Barry Schwabsky commented that the African-American artist Robert Colescott's paintings in the United States pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale were "a reminder that what seems most traditional can be most subversive."⁹

What does it mean to be using hand processes to make art in this Postmodern age of the simulacrum? The recent renaissance of handwork can be identified with a wide variety of sources. The following is an attempt to draw on some of these sources to clarify the place of the hand in contemporary art.

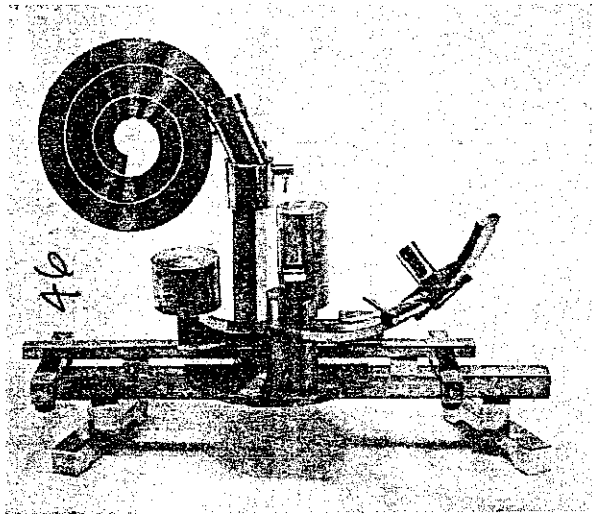
The Hand and Art as Sensuous Idea
 A sixteenth-century duel, recounted in the memoirs of the Renaissance sculptor Baccio Bandinelli, was fought between Bandinelli's cousin and the Vidame of Chartres because of some particularly rancorous fighting words from the Vidame. The Vidame claimed that Florentine nobles who had taken up painting and sculpture were actually practicing the "manual arts."¹⁰ This, of course, was an insult not to be ignored during the Renaissance. Artists were struggling then to separate themselves from hand-oriented crafts such as glass-making or pottery and to ally themselves with poets, architects, and musicians into a new, more refined, intellectual and prestigious category called "fine art."

Historically, sculptors and painters had been classified as artisans and craftspeople—not "artists"—and they therefore suffered from an early mean abandoning handwork does not necessarily mean abandoning Today, embracing now a lot less predictable," said, "ironically, painting is academic," Bochner has 25 years have become lion' has taken in the last forms that artistic 'rebellion' followed suit. "Most of the as Richard Prince, have deconstructive mode, such fashioned" Conceptual, once worked in an 'old' painting. Other artists who hand-worked abstract has now embraced heavily Conceptual art. Mel Bochner, tions of "dematerialized" one of the original practitioners on conventional devices 25 years ago. Indeed, because it relies too heavily as it once did—perhaps no longer seems as fresh Conceptual art made now led "avant-garde" under the age of 40. Much of the disembody competition for artists entries—689—to its portrait a record number of London last year reported National Portrait Gallery in Postmodern ironic cynicism.⁶ Even the stuffy ing itself and their lack of of their "unashamed" celebration of the act of painting surfaces "radical" because Tuymans in a recent show, calls their hand-built painters Elizabeth Peyton, John Currin, and Luc (MoMA) in New York, who included works by the an assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art, elaborated processes "as a noticeable characteristics of some of the newest art."⁵ Laura Hoptman, the new common ground "for the next generation of young artists,"⁴ Lisa Phillips, curator of the 1997 Whitney Biennial, has also identified increased "attention to handmade things and electronic art, handcrafts—long bound by tradition—have re-emerged as radical and fresh practices. Paul Shimmel, North American curator for the most recent São Paulo Biennale, has identified "a concentration of decoration and craft as the new common ground" for the next generation of young artists.⁴ Lisa Phillips, curator of the 1997 Whitney Biennial, has also identified increased "attention to handmade things and elaborate processes" as a noticeable characteristics of some of the newest art.⁵ Laura Hoptman, an assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, who included works by the painters Elizabeth Peyton, John Currin, and Luc Tuymans in a recent show, calls their hand-built surfaces "radical" because of their "unashamed" celebration of the act of painting itself and their lack of Postmodern ironic cynicism.⁶ Even the stuffy National Portrait Gallery in London last year reported a record number of entries—689—to its portrait competition for artists under the age of 40. Much of the disembody led "avant-garde" Conceptual art made now no longer seems as fresh as it once did—perhaps because it relies too heavily on conventional devices 25 years ago. Indeed, one of the original practitioners of "dematerialized" hand-worked abstract painting. Other artists who once worked in an 'old' fashioned" Conceptual, deconstructive mode, such as Richard Prince, have followed suit. "Most of the forms that artistic 'rebellion' has taken in the last 25 years have become academic," Bochner has said, "ironically, painting is now a lot less predictable."

Today, embracing handwork does not necessarily mean abandoning



Mel Bochner
 Painting for four eyes, 1993. Oil on canvas, 98" x 196". Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York.



Gary Justis
Adjustable Sex Lock, 1996. Aluminum, steel, copper, brass, 15 1/4" x 20" x 12". Courtesy of Klein Art Works, Chicago.

association with manual labor, a prejudice going back to ancient Greece.

During the Middle Ages, sculptors belonged to guilds that included stone masons and bricklayers, while painters belonged to guilds for gilders and saddlers. Eventually, craft guilds became powerful political forces—powerful enough to challenge the grip monarchs had thus far held over such activities. It was no accident that the advent of academies for artists in the seventeenth century, which drew artists away from membership in guilds, was heavily sponsored by monarchs and royal courts, who saw an opportunity to break the power of the guilds. This separation—between painters and sculptors and the other craft workers—definitively severed fine art from craft, and it also evolved into a separation of intellect and hand, or body, a break that was a result of *politics* rather than aesthetics.

The duality between craft (the hand/body) and art (the mind) came to a head in philosophical and aesthetic debates during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Its legacy—the Cartesian split between the mind and the material world (where the act of *thinking*, rather than feeling or sensing, assures

us of our existence)—still reaches into our Postmodern culture. The dominance of brainwork over handwork is reflected today in art and cultural theory that privileges language over images and objects. "I often talk about Postmodernism as precisely the fulfillment of certain Enlightenment agendas," University of Chicago art historian Barbara Maria Stafford has said. Nevertheless, she adds, there is a human need to be "anchored in something that isn't merely simulated, degraded or cerebral. . . . The body is our locus . . . for experiencing the world. So we have to at some fundamental level revalue it again, and say that it is aesthetically spiritual and that it is mental, just as the mind is corporealized and spiritualized."¹¹ The privileging of the human hand in art-making calls into question Western dualism: what cultural theorist Homi Bhaba calls "binary boundaries," the domination of either/or polarities in defining the world around us.¹² However, the search to re-integrate the hand, the body, and the physical senses in art does not mean a retreat into an essentialism or universalization. The hand, as a sign of the individual, is potentially the ultimate purveyor of idiosyncrasy, personal identity, and spiritual power. Probably for that reason, prehistoric artists covered cave walls with hundreds of hand images.

The synthesis of the hand and the mind as a way of life has a long history in craft art. The potter Marguerite Wildenhain, for example, writes:

This intimate correlation of the quick perception of the eye with the inner concept of the heart and mind, and the sensitive training of the hand, this immediate reaction of all the capacities of a human being, will always be the aim of any training of a craftsman and artist. It is only the potency of these combined abilities that will give the artist the power to

convey what he feels in his own personal way.¹³

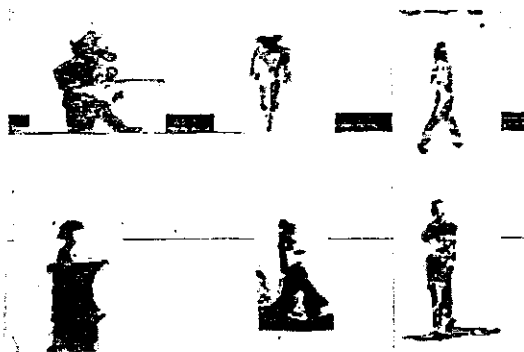
Contemporary craft theory of the hand also has deep roots in Asian art. Japanese aesthetician and writer Shoetsu Yanagi, whose classic *The Unknown Craftsman* influenced several generations of Western craft artists, calls the question of the survival of handcrafts:

not simply technological or economic, but, basically, a spiritual question. . . . It seems to me that there is something so basic, so natural in the hand that the urge to utilize its power will always make itself felt. . . . The chief characteristic of handcrafts is that they maintain by their very nature a direct link with the human heart, so that the work always partakes of a human quality.¹⁴

Yanagi helped popularize the 400-year-old Japanese tea ceremony in the West, an aesthetic outgrowth of Zen Buddhism. The Way of Tea counters Western dualistic notions of beauty and ugliness, asymmetry and symmetry. According to the Japanese custom, the best art shows austerity, humility, depth, simplicity, restraint, intuition, and even imperfection—qualities that are the very opposite of many Greek ideals.

Trying to find the way out of the problem of dualism (beautiful/ugly, mind/hand, art/life, consciousness/world) has been a slight but persistent thread underlying twentieth-century Western philosophy and aesthetics. Two writers—French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and crafts theorist David Pye—have made perhaps the most striking contributions, by interpreting the work of art—and its making—as a seamless fusion of the sensual and the intellectual. This radically moves the artwork beyond pure idea or mere intentional act.

Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist, countered a dualistic philosophical tradition beginning with Plato by suggesting that human consciousness and perception is fundamentally connected to the world; it is not an "inner realm" that opposes, dominates, and organizes an otherwise impenetrable and meaningless "outside" world of matter (including the body). This "theory of embodiment" argues that human perception, rather than being cerebral and transcendental, is



Luc Tuymans
Moves, c. 1982. Watercolor and collage on paper, 8" x 11 1/2". Courtesy of Kunstmuseum Bern and University of California, Berkeley Art Museum.

74

of troubling subjects, as in his ele-

gant, understated paintings of con-

centration camps from the late

1980s. These pared-down, psychi-

cally bland works—which Tujmans

calls "unimages"—force the viewer

to complete their meaning (see

Duchamp).²² But Tujmans's

evanescent paintings—like the work

of a number of younger and mid-

career artists—poindeley remain

physical objects that accommodate

and reflect their conditional, ever-

mutating Postmodern environ-

ment. Their status as objects is

gained through their handmade

qualities.

This work elaborates on con-

temporary art theory inaugurated

by Walter Benjamin, who wrote

that technology, with its speed and

its endless ability to multiply and

reproduce, has transformed art

irreducibly. Mechanically appropri-

ated images, while undermining

traditional assumptions about origi-

inality in art (what is real or

authentic?), perhaps circumvent a

direct, physical give and take with

the art object, for the maker and

viewer alike. Even more broadly,

deconstructive theories coming

out of a French philosophical con-

text and taken up by the art world

have challenged the very idea of

unequivocal, or grounded, percep-

tion itself, and have described a

dematerialized "everyday surface

of life." Finding meaning either in

oneself or in the world depends

not on a single perceptual stand-

point and a bedrock of certain

meaning, but on deciphering an

unstable, ever-changing network of

relations surrounding it.²³

While Tujmans's paintings

seem to echo the fleeting style of

contemporary electronic culture,

his concentrated hand facture

pulls his art into the physical

world. Significantly, Tujmans

began his art career in film, and

carefully culls his images from

books, newspapers, and snapshots.

Why is the workmanship of

risk valuable in art objects? The

workmanship of certainty can

also yield high quality. Only

through the workmanship of risk,

however, is it possible to reveal

the sense of life and moment-by-

moment human decision that is

recorded in the process of mak-

ing. The workmanship of risk may

produce subtlety, richness, and

variety in a work's formal ele-

ments that deepen upon inspec-

tion. Pye writes: "A thing properly

designed and made continually

reveals new complexes of newly

perceived formal elements the

nearer you get to it."²¹ These

slight improvisations and irregu-

larities, with contrast and tension

between them, from the smallest

visible scale on up, are what vital-

ize and individualize art.

Although Pye dislikes the

term "handmade," the qualities

he finds important in art-making

are almost always associated with

the hand: individuality; variety;

facility; close, tactile familiarity;

with a material; and an emphasis

on an intimate visual range in

experiencing an artwork. To per-

ceive what Pye calls "diversity"

requires the observer to move in

close-within hand's reach—and to

employ much more than a narrow

Cartesian cerebral capacity.

The Hand and the Problem of

the "Real"

Art that is grounded in materials-

based handwork holds a special

dialogue with a Postmodern cul-

ture, which negates a firm found-

ation as a basis for constructing

reality. When Belgian artist Luc

Tujmans describes his paintings

as "authentic falsifications," an

apparent oxymoron, he articu-

lates the synthetic position of

artists who make handmade

Postmodern art. Tujmans's pale

brushmarks construct aloof,

rarely legible, abstracted images

two poles—there's the pole of the

one who makes the work, and the

pole of the one who looks at it. I

give the latter as much impor-

tance as the one who makes it...

A work is made of the admiration

we bring to it."¹⁸

The British architect,

designer, and craftsman David

semantic qualities, "formal con-

figurations which refer, in some

sense, beyond themselves," they

are also more than their linguistic

structures.¹⁵ Art tries to engage

"our whole being"—not just cogni-

tively, but by constructing a sen-

sual reality as we might encounter

it in perception itself, through the

marks, the erasures, and the

physical processes left by the

artist's hand in the work.

Artworks reflect our own inser-

tion in the world—a blend of tran-

scendental meaning and physical

presence—and are "individuals,

that is, beings in which the

Industrial Revolution, adding that

the water-driven hammer is an

essential component in the

process of making, is what he

calls the "workmanship of risk,"

means

of association about it—its clay

(and the historical lineage that

method of making (and the his-

torical alliance with artists who

developed the method over thou-

sands of years), as well as its

function (the meaning of the pot

is completed only when it is

used.) This last, of course, was

recognized by that great *saboteur*

of art categories Marcel Duchamp,

who, although he detested sen-

sual painting, nevertheless

paintstakingly handcrafted his

masterwork *The Bride Stripped*

Bare by Her Bachelors. Even over

a seven-year period,¹⁷ Duchamp

insisted on calling himself a

"craftsman," and maintained that

bad craftsmanship in an artwork

should never be allowed to

detract from the purity of its

idea. Like a craft artist, Duchamp

combined meaning with use, link-

ing the audience (or user) with

the essential meaning of the art:

"I consider, in effect, that if some-

one, any genius, were living in the

heart of Africa and doing extraor-

inary paintings everyday, with-

out anyone's seeing him, he

wouldn't exist." Duchamp told the

writer Pierre Cabanne, "The artist

exists only if he is known . . .

because, in brief, it's a product of

John Pomara

Family Feud 1, Family Feud 2, 1997.

Enamel, Vaseline, and ink on canvas;

diptych, 20" x 16" each. Courtesy of

The Smart Museum of Art, Chicago.

the workmanship of risk means

predictable. Pye maintained that

of the product predetermined and

ship of certainty, and the quality

incentive behind the workman-

automation. Speed is usually the

found in quantity production and

manship of certainty," which is

Pye contrasts this with the "work-

during the process of making."¹⁹

the result is continually at risk

as he works. . . . The quality of

care which the maker exercises

on the judgment, dexterity, and

not predetermined, but depends

which the quality of the result is

kind of technique or apparatus in

simply workmanship using any

The workmanship of risk "means

of association about it—its clay

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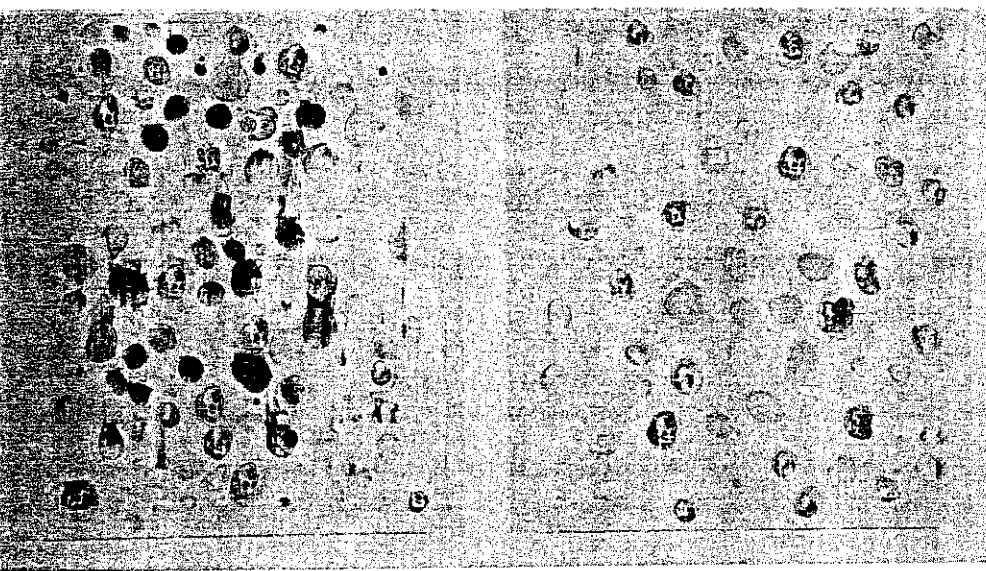
John Pomara

Family Feud 1, Family Feud 2, 1997.

Enamel, Vaseline, and ink on canvas;

diptych, 20" x 16" each. Courtesy of

John Pomara
Family Feud 1, Family Feud 2, 1997.
Enamel, Vaseline, and ink on canvas;
diptych, 20" x 16" each. Courtesy of
The Smart Museum of Art, Chicago.



But the work is obstinately somewhere, of a place. Laura Hoptman calls this a "significantly changed attitude among new painters," an integration of the Conceptual with a serious, passionate, and unironic love for the physical act of painting. "This work is about preparing to stun you with the painting," she says.²⁴ Tuymans has called his work so "concentrated" that he compares it to "another type of arousal."²⁵ While the images may be pulled from standard media sources, these artworks are not merely "representations of representations." Rather, they unabashedly seduce the viewer into a visual engagement with the material qualities of the art, and as such hold a radical, and rooted, position in the variable play of meaning.

The combination of a fleeting, transient Postmodern sensibility with the flat-out gorgeousness of handworked material is apparent, too, in the work of some mid-career artists, such as Lari Pittman's baroque, flamboyantly decorated paintings, for example, or Phillip Taaffe's Islamic patternings, which involve numerous hand processes that include constructing templates, sanding, painting, hand-inking, and collaging. Taaffe describes his art-making as "a search for the ruthless thing," noting, "what I want to make is something very physical and very perceptually demanding" at the same time.²⁶ The Smart Museum's "Post-Pop, Post-Pictures" featured work that is "highly conceptual and also a seductive object," according to curator Courtenay Smith.²⁷ In the show, John Pomara's heavily worked enamel, Varathane varnish, and ink diptychs with images that echo the electronic blurs on television; Michelle Grabner's painstakingly hand-replicated household patterns painted with enamel on plywood; and David Szafranski's legal pads minutely and densely covered with tiny prints and hand drawings all expressed edgy Postmodern themes while still calling attention to how carefully they were made. This intentional positioning of the artwork in the material world does not deny the complexity—and diffusion of standpoints—in constructing meaning in Postmodern culture. But its mediation through the

human hand and body can rehumanize art and provide a powerful embodied reference point—a "real" map—within a provisional experience that has been "analyzed away in a mere play of relations" in much currently fashionable theory.²⁸

The Hand and the Convergence of Space, Time, and the Senses Early Conceptual art evolved from what was called the "priority of the idea" in art-making; that is, that the idea for the work comes first, and therefore is the most essential part of art. In the early '70s, Mel Bochner's masking tape and text artworks, for example, were not just straightforward vehicles for communicating ideas, but were actually visual investigations into—and critiques of—ideas as institutions. Bochner, however, had already begun to lose faith by the mid-'70s, noting that there is no primacy to any aspect of experience. What, for example, about ideas that develop while making art? Bochner's transition to intensely hand-worked, sensuous abstract painting allowed him to continue his investigations into watching how the mind works. "For me, painting, because it is in and of the material world, offers an access to the processes of the mind, to the indecisions and uncertainties philosophy can't cope with," he notes.²⁹ His distaste for "literalist" or "declarative" art—"painting is not merely a statement; it is also a question"—also allows Bochner to emphasize process in art-making, along with the complexity, ambiguity, and doubt that are part of it. In his early work, Bochner explored the intersection of space and language (or ideas) through visual riddles. Now, by recording a "narrative of revisions" through his brush strokes, Bochner's paintings intersect space (or the visual) with time. "In painting, I want to encode time as it evolves."³⁰

The compression of time into an artwork through hand processes turns up in contemporary sculpture as well. Tom Friedman and Gary Justis both use meticulous handwork to produce their conceptually oriented pieces. Friedman's obsessively hand-processed everyday materials—a self-portrait carved out of an aspirin, a piece of bubble gum stretched 20 feet from floor to ceiling, or 30,000 toothpicks

glued into a starburst form—skewer Modernist conventions of solemnity and scale. Justis's elegant, handmade machines echo a Duchampian mixture of mechanics and mythology. There is no one-liner quality to these works; the sculptures of both artists take time: both to make and to experience. Justis hammers home the message with his sculptures, so to speak: they sometimes contain small gongs that chime in repetitive cycles, lulling the viewer into a meditative wait—with an emphasis on that interval of time—for each successive ring.

The use of the hand in art-making can convey extraordinary psychic depth and physical density when time is part of the process. Vija Celmins's thickly built-up drawings and paintings of galaxies, oceans, and deserts exude, for example, what she calls a "fatness" or a "volume." They are "phenomenological investigations," translations of experience into condensed matter beyond a mere idea. Celmins's search for this "rich and complete form" in her work (such as putting 18 layers of paint on a canvas, and still not being finished) links time and physical matter: "I like to think that time stops in art," Celmins once told an interviewer. "When you work on a piece for a long period it seems to capture time.... When you pack a lot of time into a work, something happens that

slows the image down, makes it more physical."³¹ Celmins's hand-made paintings, once again, balance the scale between idea and embodiment, emerging as relentlessly consolidated fields of intellectual and physical matter.

The Hand and Ethical Development

Finally, for good or bad, the use of the hand in art has often carried overtly moral and ethical overtones in some art circles. This attitude is often attributed to the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the century, and especially to one of its British leaders, William Morris. But Morris, who wrote and lectured frequently about the importance of handcrafts and who founded the Morris and Company craft and design firm, in practice "never made a shibboleth of handwork" and didn't argue against the use of all machinery, especially when workers were not exploited and the quality of the output was good.³² Instead, his real aim was social change; handcraft for Morris, who was a socialist, meant work without the division of labor between worker and designer in the rigidly hierarchical and exploitive industrial workplace of the nineteenth century. Morris linked social and political renewal with aesthetics, arguing that the promotion of handwork not only improved soci-



David Pye in his workshop.

Only through the workmanship of risk is it possible to reveal the sense of life and moment-by-moment human decision that is recorded in the process of making.

Jason Edward Kaufman, "The 69th Whitney Biennial, New York: Made by hand, telling stories and talking to the public," *The Art Newspaper*, March 1997, 12.

9Barbara Maria Stafford quoted in "Interview," *Sculpture*, May-June 1994, 13-14.

12Hommi K. Bhabha, "The Location of Culture" (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 251.

13Marguerite Wildgen, *The Invisible Core*: A Potter's Life and Thoughts (Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1973), 133.

14Shoetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman* (Tokyo and Palo Alto, CA: Kodansha International, 1972), 107-108.

15Paul Crowther, *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 48. Crowther's analysis of Merleau-Ponty's place in Postmodern art are extremely insightful.

16Ibid., 44.

17Robert Motherwell was the first to call Duchamp "the great saboteur," in his introduction to Cabanne's book, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 12.

18Quoted in Cabanne, 69.

19David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Bethel Court, UK: Cambrium Press, 1995), 20.

20Ibid., 61-62.

21Ibid., 61.

22Laura Hopfman, catalogue essay, *Projects* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1997), unpaginated.

23Paul Crowther, "The Postmodern Sublime," *Art and Design*, January/February 1995, 5.

24Author's interview with Hopfman, fall 1997.

25Luc Tuymans, quoted in Hopfman, *Projects*, 20.

26Luc Tuymans, "Talking Abstract II," *Art in America*, December 1987, 122.

27Author's interview with Courtney Smith, fall 1997.

28Crowther, *The Postmodern Sublime*, 17.

29Mel Bochner, quoted in Charles Stucky, "Interview with Mel Bochner," *Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery Press*, 1985, 101.

30Meyer, "The Gallery is a Theater," 101.

31Jeanne Silverthorne, "Vija Celmins in Conversation with Jeanne Silverthorne," *Parkett*, 1995, 42.

32Harrod, *William Morris Revisited*, 7.

33Pye, *Workmanship*, 123.

34Harrod, *William Morris Revisited*, 8-9.

35Ibid., 35.

36Quoted in Patricia Malachuk, "Re-Visioning the Crafts," *MetalSmith*, Spring 1986, 40.

37Frederic Tuten, "Fischli's Italian Hours," *Art in America*, November 1996, 79.

Paulo, *Art in America*, March 1997, 39.

Edward Leffingwell, "Report from 530 University Press, 1992), 154.

Decline of Modernism (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 154.

3 Joseph Beuys, quoted in Peter Burger, *The Crafts Council Gallery*, 1996, 19.

Revised, *Questioning the Legacy* (London: "Paradise Postponed," *William Morris* 1971), 38, 39.

David Pye, quoted in Tanya Harrod, *Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 38, 39.

As categories continue to be dis-mantled and mixed together, many fine artists and craft artists alike find that they frequently stand on common ground, especially as their work revolves around the issues of process, materials, and handwork. In the "craft world," this is called "cross-over," and it is often met with consternation—as well as elation. Clearly, a sculptor such as Jim Hodges, who constructs knot-

ely by reorganizing relationships in the workplace, but that it was also a path to personal and moral development for the art worker. Because of Morris and other Arts and Crafts leaders, "the mark of the hand" became a prestigious feature in decorative art and manufactured goods at the turn of the century, no matter what Pye's ironic story about a potter who, in discussing his teapot adds, "Of course it leaks, it's handmade."³³

A rigorously pure theory of handwork, however, did evolve from the Arts and Crafts movement, and continues to affect the contemporary craft world today. Pioneering studio-craft leaders—among them Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, and William Straite Murray—began to articulate values that placed less emphasis on Morris's social crusading and more on craft objects as the equals of painting and sculpture. By the 1930s, craft had broken with the political left; to socialists, making "luxury" items by hand seemed self-indulgent during an economic depression. No longer part of the industrial or economic base, craft objects evolved into art objects.

Influenced by the Modernists Clive Bell and Roger Fry (who democratized art hierarchy), the new craft leaders conveyed attitudes that defined them more as artists than designers or laborers. They emphasized integrity, timelessness, and authenticity in their work, with a deep respect for the kind of craft that replaced discipline. We were made to feel from day one that we were artists, fully sprung from the womb an artist. What experience has shown me is that it takes your life to become an artist.³⁷

extends from the beginning to the end of the art-making process: "from digging the clay himself, to throwing and decorating the pots, built with wood he had collected himself."³⁵

This attitude, rather than promising social improvement in general, still carried a high ethical tone: the arduous hand skills (and, consequently, life skills) developed over time by the artists became the standard for his or her character development and moral worth. As craft objects

have become more like art objects, a terrible anxiety has arisen in some corners of the craft world—that the crafts are being corrupted by the fine-art world and its marketplace. In a talk titled "Craft as Attitude," delivered at a forum called "Re-Visioning the Crafts" at the Penland School for Crafts in the mid-'80s, ceramist Wayne Higby complained about the low quality of craft art, saying that crafts were becoming so "slick" that the maker's hand is no longer visible." Higby said that the humanistic, spiritual principles originally at work in crafts degraded by an art establishment which rewards artists who are the best marketers, not artists with the most integrity.³⁶

This, ironically, is a complaint often heard from fine artists as well. Eric Fischl, for example, in looking back at what he thought was the shallowness—the inattentiveness to hand skills and art history—in his own early art training, comments angrily: Part of the problem is that artists of my generation were not educated. We were not given the equipment, because it was generally believed to be irrelevant. Drawing, eye-hand coordination, art history—really relevant stuff—was considered unnecessary. . . . In fact, it is incredibly disrespectful of the importance of history that we treat people to be amateurs. I deeply resent the kind of flat-terry that replaced discipline. We were made to feel from day one that we were artists, fully sprung from the womb an artist. What experience has shown me is that it takes your life to become an artist.³⁷

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ted chains of silk flowers and threaded into large-scale delicate webs and floating to fiber art direct connections to fiber art through his hand processes and materials. And among politically oriented artists, the painter Sue Williams, who developed a savvy reputation based on her strident, painful images of sexual abuse, has continued those themes, but now through intensely worked oil and acrylic paintings. In fact, the prominence of a number of contemporary painters who are not necessarily affiliated in any other way—Terry Winters, David Ortins, William Wood, Therese Oulton, Hunt Stoner, Juan Usle, Prudente Irazabal, and Julio Sarmiento—is due in large part to the striking qualities of the hand-work in their art.

To acknowledge the importance of handwork in art is not a revelation; early Modernist works such as Cézanne's paintings reveal themselves through heavily hand-applied brushwork and materials. And there is a strikingly handmade quality to much of the avant-garde art of the early twentieth century. But handcrafts have been a frequently ignored undercurrent percolating in fine art since Renaissance artists quit the craft guilds for greener—and more prestigious—pastures in the temporary courts. Many contemporary artists, however, have deliberately chosen a wide variety of hand processes to develop Postmodern themes in their art. This is not a regression to a narrow and purist Modernist formalism, but rather continues the Post-modern journey toward multiplicity, and reacquaints us all with the historical and aesthetic links between craft and fine art. newist