WASHINGTON ART MATTERS: ART LIFE IN THE CAPITAL 1940 – 1990

BY JEAN LAWLOR COHEN • SIDNEY LAWRENCE • ELIZABETH TEBOW • AFTERWORD BY BENJAMIN FORGEY

CHAPTER 5

A Decade Of Reckoning

1980S PART 1

BY SIDNEY LAWRENCE

The 1980s was a decade of conflicts and resolutions, victories and losses, and the best way to tell this complex tale is not strictly chronologically, but in a more casual, meandering way, mixing anecdotes, historical facts, profiles of key players and reflections on the aesthetic issues of those times, most still unresolved. An art culture in a political city is basically an underground one, reliably graphed as a sine-wave of up-curves and down-curves. In the 1980s, it rose gradually, teetered occasionally, started to coalesce and finally, almost involuntarily, exploded.
J. W. Mahoney, Washington-based artist, critic and curator 1

2. A Corcoran pas-de-deux by "Empire" dancers Arne Zane and Bill T. Jones, a now-legendary duo brought to D.C. for the 1980 event

1. PREVIOUS: The Robert Mapplethorpe projection on the Corcoran Gallery facade in 1989

Put another way, the D.C. art community became more pro-active and self-aware during the 1980s, and power politics—the heartbeat of this city—became less and less avoidable. The Culture Wars gained momentum, and it was time to take a stand. Against this backdrop, valiant attempts were made to define a "Washington art" as salient and nationally significant as the Washington Color School. Washington may not have evolved into a world art center along the lines of London, Tokyo or New York, or today's Berlin, for instance, but commitment to art as a principle and a practice reached new levels during the decade. The Mapplethorpe debacle of 1989, discussed at the end of this essay, fired up the troops.

The 1980s dawned with a bit of schizophrenia. Reagan's inauguration was a huge relief for some (a decisive president) and a horrible threat to others (arts funding cuts). The sexual revolution further liberated men and women, but with the arrival of AIDS in 1981, that freedom held a darker reality. Money seemed to flow as never before with conspicuous spending, while shrinking government funds for social-welfare and mental-health programs forced increasing numbers of the needy into the streets.

All the while, artists produced, dealers sold, critics analyzed, teachers instructed and collectors collected. To even the most financially flush collector-investors (including law firms, developers and corporations with curator-consultants), the value of the creative eye and mind prevailed. The passion was for art.

Washington continued to watch New York. Already in 1980, Howard Halley had introduced his Corcoran students to some of that city's edgiest work via slides of Julian Schnabel's plate paintings and Sherrie Levine's retreads of past art by males. Then Robert Longo (painter of the boldly graphic, retro-Kennedy-era figures in agitated poses) came to town to present the world premiere of his two-night performance, "Empire," in the Corcoran atrium.[2] While 300 people watched, students held candles, dancers weaved through the crowd, Brian Eno's amorphous music played (plus live saxophones), smoke billowed, and semi-naked figures posed on a revolving turntable in what amounted to "a sensory tour-de-force," recalls Mahoney. "It was very stylish, but without much meaning. Postmodern New York had arrived, with a bang."

POSTMODERN—YES OR NO?

What was this "Postmodernism"? Certain New York artists of the 1980s struggled with how to be "new" in an era when newness, in the sense of stylistic innovation — the seedbed of modernist painting and sculpture — had run its course with earthworks (sculpture as landscape intervention) and minimalism (the ultimate abstraction a la Ad Reinhardt and Carl André).

Eschewing visible handicraft and veering toward a cool, mechanical look and conceptual strategizing, Postmodernists co-opted other people's art (often classic modernism), cinema history and TV clichés (as in Longo's imagery), and the Pop Art ethos of commercialism. Their works ranged from staged photographs and near-perfect art reproductions to whizzing electronic signboards and stenciled posters, tote bags, stickers and pencils with quasi-philosophical slogans. Themes of feminism, consumer culture and pop mythology permeated these creations. Postmodernism's essence was less about art's time-honored role as a locus for quiet contemplation and personal reverie, and more about big-city buzz and the impulse to critique social, cultural and aesthetic issues of the moment. That left a whole lot of art, including Washington's celebrated painting trend of the 1960s—its Color School — in the dustbin.

In Washington, Postmodernism was met with skeptical curiosity. In his new space on 7th Street in 1982, dealer Chris Middendorf showed a compendium of photo-based examples—Richard Prince's Marlboro Man riffs, Richard Goldstein's painted copies of Margaret Bourke-White's London Blitz photos and Cindy Sherman's ever-stagier self-posings. That same year Hirshhorn curator Phyllis Rosenzweig presented Sherrie Levine's precise renderings of early 20th century abstractions by Russian avant-gardist Kasimir Malevich as part of "United Artists," a renegade series of exhibitions initiated by Corcoran professor Doug Lang.[3] Such ironies told Washington artists little they didn't already know. Post-Pop-Art detachment in the Warholian mold was hip and interesting, to be sure, but where was the substance, and why should D.C. pay attention?

3. At a Hirshhorn opening in 1991, curator Frank Gettings (right) keeps things lively with an unidentified guest (left) while exhibiting sculptor Saint-Clair Cemin, a Brazilian, chats with D.C.'s Robin Rose.

THE HIRSHHORN AND LOCAL ART

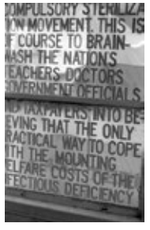
The Hirshhorn hired a new director in 1984 to replace genial founding director Abram "Al" Lerner (1913-1997), who had shepherded the museum through its sometimes difficult early years. James Demetrion from the Des Moines Art Center, a one-time protégé (at the Pasadena Art Museum) of curatorial maestro Walter Hopps, immediately made it clear that his primary goal as director was to prune and upgrade the 12,000-work holdings donated and bequeathed by founder Joseph H. Hirshhorn, who had died in 1981.

Demetrion also kept an eye on Washington art, aware of, but not blinded by, New York. Curators looked too, and the Hirshhorn soon bought selective pieces by installation-savvy painter-sculptor Kendall Buster, abstract imagist W.C. "Chip" Richardson and encaustic color poet (and rock musician) Robin Rose. Washington art also showed up in major Hirshhorn exhibitions. Buster and Peter Fleps, a painter of landscapes mounted as viewing pedestals, were in Rosenzweig's "Directions" shows of 1983 and 1986, respectively; sculptor John Van Alstine was one of Howard Fox's choices for the inaugural "Directions" show in 1979; and significant pieces by sculptors Alan Stone and Jim Sanborn were part of the mammoth "Content' show of 1984, which Fox co-curated with Rosenzweig and Miranda McClintic (who went independent later that year).

These three curators, plus colleagues Cynthia Jaffee McCabe (1943-86) and Ned Rifkin (relocating from the Corcoran in 1985), made it a point to know local artists, jury D.C. shows and sometimes buy (for themselves) D.C. art. However, to quote Mahoney's vivid recollection, "only Frank Gettings [1931-2011], the museum's Pickwickian, eccentric Curator of Prints and Drawings, spent much quality time talking, and drinking, with Washington artists."

Despite these Washington-friendly gestures, the fact remained that the Hirshhorn, the Smithsonian's internationally-oriented showcase for contemporary art, was minimally interested in sticking its neck out on behalf of local artists. The Phillips Collection, as always, inspired reverence among Washington painters, even as

4. Dynamic duo at WPA:
Joy Silverman and Al Nodal



5. The Ritz Project on opening night, 1983

renovations, annex construction and masterpieces on tour during the 1980s (director Laughlin Phillips's initiatives to ensure a healthy future) provided disruptions, but nods to local talent did happen, among them a small 1989 show outdoors of recent sculpture by John McCarty. The Corcoran, which had a longer history, an art school and a city-proud board, continued to serve the local art world but, as we shall see, with mixed results.

BETTER AT IT: WPA

More important contributions came from the Washington Project for the Arts. Under director Al Nodal in 1981, WPA launched the "Options" biennials to showcase "emerging, unrepresented, or under-recognized" D.C. area artists.[4] The first two installments, curated by Gene Davis and Mary Swift (1981) and Ed Love and Joe Shannon (1983), revealed a panoramic art practice in and around Washington—Yuriko Yamaguchi's wall-mounted organisms, Chris Gardner's arrow-dynamic sculptures, Steve Moore's color-intense palm trees and cows, Felrath Hines's airy abstractions, Andrew Krieger's quirky shadowboxes in pencil and Stephen C. Foster's darkly psychological collages, to name a few. Like all people who cluster in cities, artists bring divergent sensibilities and ways of self-expression. Pluralism, long apparent in Washington art, continued through the decade.

In spring 1983, under WPA's watch, scores of D.C. artists (Tom Ashcroft, Ed Bisese, Gene Davis, Georgia Deal, Michael Welzenbach, Michael Platt, Gayil Nalls, Zinnia, et. al.) joined up with at least as many New Yorkers (John Ahearn, Mimi Gross, Kostabi, Tom Otterness, Walter Robinson, Kiki Smith, et al.) to commandeer, East-Village-style, the rooms and hallways of the derelict Ritz Hotel at 920 F Street. The huge, 300-artist, month-long exhibition known as the "Ritz Project," organized jointly with Collaborative Projects Inc. (COLAB) of New York, featured just about everything—visual art, sound, music, film and video, fashion and performance—plus plenty of political activism in the form of jabs at Reagan, sympathetic depictions of social and political outcasts and indictments of the era's materialism.

The New Yorkers did most of the activist work, as it happens—mostly in-your-face, messy concoctions not all that unlike, stylistically, the hot-selling Neo-Expressionist canvases in SoHo galleries—and what better launching pad for them than our own Washington, D.C., the seat city of the most conservative presidential administration in decades? The Ritz Project became, in the words of one D.C. participant, "a political dump for New York artists," [5] whereas locals, perhaps naively, saw it as an opportunity to make considered artistic statements in this curious wreck of a building. One such work, a collaboration of Ashcroft, Bisese and Deal, was a black-painted environment, a doghouse at its center, with white outlines invoking a woodsy canine dream[6] —an apt contribution from three artists among a multitude who worked in the physically peaceful, tree-lined region. But for the District's fire-hazard officials, the Ritz Project was anything but serene. Citing extreme danger, they shut down the art-dense, rickety building on April 20, five days before the exhibition's announced closing date.

The guerilla group Art Attack was a good fit for the Ritz project. Founded in 1979 in Los Angeles and new to the Washington scene, it specialized in swiftly made, temporary, collaborative site installations by a band of rotating artists. In 1984, thanks again to WPA, the group honed in on the façade on yet another dilapidated downtown building, an Italian Renaissance gem (today fully restored) above the abandoned Julius Lansburgh furniture store. For the summer-long installation, "Zones 1...5." artists Lynn McCary, Billy Burns, Mark Clark and Jared Louche (nee Hendrickson) applied gilding to ornamental relief heads and painted a mural of faces at street level. But the biggest bang for pedestrians came from the artists' *trompe l'oeil* creation of 25 funky, lifesize figures (plywood cut-outs in thrift-shop clothing) precariously climbing the three-story building as if scaling a sheer cliff, a tableau more unsettling and theatrical even than John Ahearn's on-site tenement-dweller portraits in New York. Much to the bemusement of its creators, the Art Attack piece, in

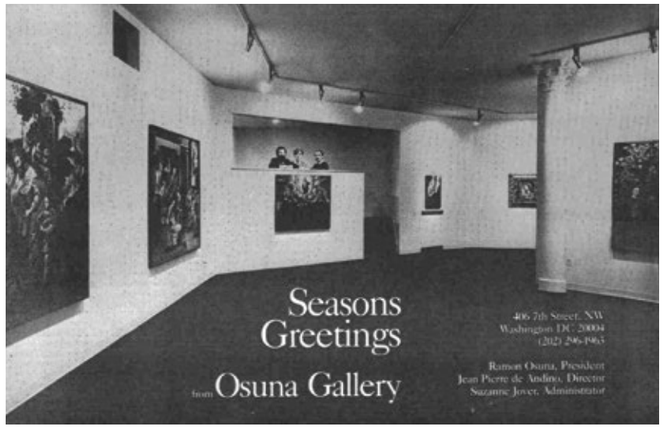
6. John McCarty (b. 1940), "Berlin III," 1989. Steel, lead and limestone, 48 ½ x 49 x 23 inches. Collection Dani and Mirella Levinas, Washington, D.C. Based in the Virginia Piedmont, where he also was born, McCarty made this work, the centerpiece of a Phillips' Solo show that year, after an extended period in West Berlin, when the Wall was still intact and armored buildings were common. McCarty's statement about the work invites these associations and, with a fanciful flourish, "dwarfs, a figure in a sack, the bride bursting from the dark tower."

1985, illustrated the cover of a trade publication about the perils of mountain climbing.[7] (see Album)

MORE GALLERIES. MORE EXPOSURE

Local galleries had always boosted Washington artists, but the difference in the flush 1980s was in sheer numbers. Chris Addison and Sylvia Ripley, Barbara Kornblatt, Ansley Wallace and Eric Wentworth, Manfred Baumgartner, Tom and Judy Brody, Robert Brown, Rebecca Cooper, Hollis Taggart, Marsha Mateyka, Michael Olshonsky, Barbara Battin Fiedler, Wretha Hanson (Franz Bader Gallery's new owner), Jack Rasmussen, Jo Tartt , and Kate Jones and Sally Troyer (soon to be joined by gallery partner Sandy Fitzpatrick)[8] all opened galleries or got their footing in the 1980s. Three others—Diane Brown, Jack Shainman and Barbara Fendrick—opened branches in New York's SoHo district during the decade, introducing the work of several D.C. artists to that market.[9] Shainman and Brown eventually left Washington for good.

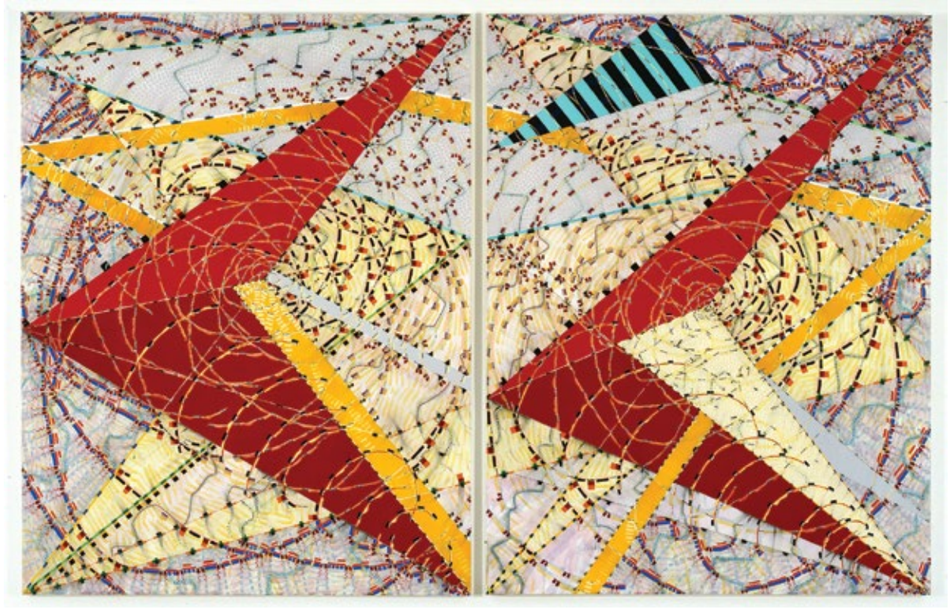
7. Art Attack, *Zones 1 … 5*, 1985, three-month installation curated by Holly Block for the Washington Project for the Arts, northwest corner of 9th and G Streets N.W.



8. Osuna Gallery's new digs at 406 Seventh Street, proudly if fuzzily trumpeted in this *Washington Review* ad. Ramon Osuna (President), Suzanne Jover (Administrator) and Jean Pierre de Andino (Director) pose amid Latin American colonial art in the David Schwarz-designed space.

Meanwhile, a mini-migration from P to R Street brought new energy to the Phillips Collection/Dupont Circle gallery district. But that shift was in effect eclipsed by the emergence of the 7th Street corridor downtown (today's "Penn Quarter")—WPA's neighborhood — north of the Hirshhorn and National Gallery on the Mall and south of the American Art/Portrait Gallery building. There, beginning in 1980, with hyper-hip amenities nearby (the Lansburgh/Atlas studio-office complex, the 930 F Street club, and the new "dc space" music venue/coffeehouse-bar/photo gallery,[10] the 930 Club), the three-story 406-7th Street Gallery Building held season after season of exhibitions blending local and national artists.

To open 1985-86, for instance, McIntosh-Drysdale Gallery (as in Nancy, one of Martin Puryear's early champions, just returning from doing business in Houston) mounted a show by manic Los Angeles installation artist Jonathan Borofsky (soon to open a Corcoran retrospective); Jane Haslem presented agitated figure paintings by D.C. veteran



9. W. C. Richardson (b. 1953), *Red Shift*, 1985, oil, acrylic and charcoal, 78 x 122 inches. Collection of the artist. Noumenalism, spiritual abstraction or Color-School-baroque—no matter how you classify it—Richardson's works have been a mainstay of Washington painting since the California-born, heartland-raised artist first arrived in the area to teach in 1978. Here, chevrons are boomerangs, linear systems go haywire, and color is illogical—an obsessive fusion of aboriginal and Moebius-strip fantasy.

Joe Shannon, and Barbara Kornblatt rounded up serene color abstractions by the distinguished Dutch-born painter and Phillips curator Willem de Looper, and so on.[11] Earlier in the decade, in 1981, 406 had been the site of Harry Lunn's memorable Robert Mapplethorpe show of elegant still-lifes, portraits and (whoa!) sexually repellent acts. In that same space a few years later, David Adamson's presses churned out prints using the latest technology ("Iris," for one) while impressive shows featured multiples by well-known local and national artists. Also memorable were Ramon Osuna's and J.P. de Andino's compellingly incongruous, market-savvy shows of Latin American Baroque paintings and sculpture.

The 7th Street gallery scene not only galvanized Washington's collecting, curatorial and art-involved public, but also ramped up opportunities for local artists to show and sell their own work as well as see what others were up to, here and elsewhere. Still, for many artists, inclusion in an exhibition at the Corcoran was the ultimate prize.

THE CORCORAN—A THORN AND AN ALLY

Even though the continuation of Washington-oriented exhibitions at the Corcoran was pretty much a given, a loose-knit group of artists, some nationally renowned like Sam Gilliam, wanted to be sure that happened. In 1981, they formed the Washington Artists' Coalition and got to work lobbying. First came curator Jane Livingston's "Ten plus Ten plus Ten," a fascinating, somewhat screwy exhibition of 1982 conceived a bit like a snow-ball dance. Ten artists chosen by Livingston picked ten more artists who picked ten more, resulting in 88 works by 30 artists.

Although personal politics played a part, this democratic, adventurous show was good for Washington to see, but something far more ambitious, encyclopedic and ultimately controversial was on the horizon. The large-scale, artist-curated exhibition of 1985, was titled, triumphantly for some but anti-climactically for others, "The Washington Show." Pegged as the biggest museum sampling of contemporary Washington-area art to date, the exhibition brought together some 125 works by 84 painters, sculptors, photographers and mixed-media artists chosen from almost a thousand who applied. A stylistically diverse, six-artist curatorial team made the selections.

The artist-curators came half from the Coalition—Rockne Krebs (laser art), Martha Jackson-Jarvis (earthen installations) and Simon Gouverneur (icono-abstract painting), and half by invitation of the Corcoran's Board of Trustees—Kevin MacDonald (realist-luminous painting, Rebecca Crumlish (film) and Polly Kraft (landscape and still-life). The division may have reined in the Coalition a bit and given the Corcoran an edge, but no matter — uniting six respected artists who knew, or at least knew of, one another was a sound political move for both sides.

Exhibiting artists were delighted by "The Washington Show," which married under-exposed with well-known figures on the scene. The selections were broad, encompassing, to cite only a few, John Gossage's fleeting night view of the Berlin Wall,

Ed Love's expressionist, welded steel figure in memory of Reggae star Bob Marley, and, as a kind of anchor, new works by old-school painters Tom Downing, Leon Berkowitz and Jacob Kainen. The show's opening date (April 11) was proclaimed "Washington Artists Day" by the (as yet untainted) Mayor Marion Barry, and spirits seemed to be soaring. However, there was grumbling. Two hundred non-participating artists staged a *salon des refusés* (called the "All Washington Show") in another part of town. As if that wasn't enough, the Corcoran also had to brace for some bad press.

Thomas Lawson, having visited from New York, called the exhibition a "horror show" in *The New Art Examiner* and lambasted its uneven quality and lack of focus.[12] D.C.'s Lee Fleming, writing for *Art News,* declared the selections monotonous and predictable.[13] Even Washington-friendly art critic Paul Richard of *The Washington Post* had problems. While acknowledging the show's celebratory tone and plethora of "imposing work," he bemoaned that "any show so varied is bound to leave a blur." [14]

Even if the critics' response to "The Washington Show" wasn't stellar, its catalog was—and still is—a virtual Rosetta Stone articulating the nature and dilemmas of art life in Washington. Essays by artists, curators, critics and poets (one with an artist's collaboration) explored Color School and African-pattern influences; how and where local artists interacted; the impact of museums, galleries, streetscapes and neighborhoods, and whether art does, or does not, fit in a city obsessed with politics, laws and world issues. It was a remarkable written record, but one basic question remained: Was Washington's art at all distinctive on a national scale? Or, was art in the Capital, as with so many American metropolises in the 1980s (even mega-New York), nothing more than a self-referential hodge-podge of market-driven mediocrity with only isolated instances of fresh, resonant work? The fact that two major Color School figures (Gene Davis and Tom Downing) died in 1985, the year of "The Washington Show," made for a certain cosmic irony. Where to next?

A HOME-GROWN ISM

After the Corcoran exhibition, a number of independent curators (mostly also artists) emerged on the scene and set out to identify a "Washington art" by means of thematic exhibitions, primarily in commercial galleries. Among these were John Figura's "Significant Movement" (in two parts) at Anton, Keith Morrison's "Myth and Ritual" at

10. OPPOSITE: Sherman Fleming/ Rod Force (b. 1953), *Fault: Axis for Life*, 1986, 20-minute reprise performance of an earlier WPA premiere at an aquatic-themed fundraiser at Yale Laundry, New York Avenue, N.W. Washington's ubiquitous performance artist spun upside-down Whirling-Dervish-style — from gradual to frantic to still, and back again—lulling, entertaining and startling partygoers with African dance actions, childhood games and vanguard theater. Such "States of Suspense" performances were gentle but emphatic reminders of the insidious, invisible forces of racism and sexism.

11. Gayil Nalls (b. 1953). *Smiling Backwards/One Who Saw/Depth*, 1985, oil on canvas, 78 x 70 inches, Dave Burnett collection, Canada. Grouped with "Iconoclassicists" in one show and "Eccentrics" in another, Nalls' work of the 1980s was "about how life, as humans have known it, was under siege" (email to author). Mentored by Gene Davis, Elaine de Kooning and others, Nalls eventually left her native Washington for New York, where she also kept a studio and ultimately moved. This painting is awash with emotion, sexual possibility and wry comedy.

Touchstone, Jim Mahoney's "Transcendence" at Baumgartner and "Aspirations" at the Collector Art Gallery Restaurant, Mahoney's "Elegies" co-curated with Mokha Laget at Tartt, Laget's *Metaphoric Structure*s at Strathmore Arts Center in Rockville, Maryland, Mel Watkin's *Dream On* at WPA and a dual show curated by its exhibitors, most of them sculptors, G*athering Forces*, at Brody's and Gallery K.

These exhibitions covered artists as stylistically varied (serene, expressive, geometric, abstract, figurative, diagrammatic) as Simon Gouverneur, Hilary Daley-Hynes, Yvonne Pickering Carter, Robin Rose, Caroline Orner, Tom Downing, Genna Watson, Denise Ward Brown and W.C. "Chip" Richardson. What held their productions together was a kind of home-grown spiritualism—something New York art critic Dan Cameron called "a sincere effort to transcend irony and to reintroduce a spiritual dimension to painting." Cameron also wrote, in a D.C.-focused article for the *The New Art Examiner* in March 1988, that Washington was "one of the premier groundswells for art activity that addresses these concerns." [15] *Washington Post* art critic Paul Richard put it another way a year later, noting a "sense of myths retrieved, of retrospective dreaming" and "private passions, deeply felt."[16]

Clearly the idea of a movement was in the air, and, in a piece for *The New Art Examiner* published in February 1990, painter-curator Mokha Laget gave it a name: Noumenalism. Created in reaction to "the threat of a universally meaningless art" (her sly reference to Postmodernism), Noumenalism represented "a reconciliation of reason and imagination, of logic and intuition…an authentic aspiration toward a well-formed *inner* life capable of generating *outer* transformation" [Laget's italics] and "a return to metaphysical consciousness."

In attempting to bring "the simultaneous diversity and unity" of Washington art under one banner, Laget charted the emergence of three sub-trends of Noumenalism—"transcendent abstraction," "painterly mythic figuration" and "sculptural eco-mythic figuration." [17] Laget's stamp was perhaps too theoretical to take hold, and it may have overlooked such salient developments as Art Attack's guerilla installations, Sherman Fleming/Rod Force's race-tinged performances and an intensely emotive figurative art then being developed by such genre-straddling individuals as Jody Mussoff with her colored pencil drawings, assemblagist "Big Al" Carter and painter Gayil Nalls. Nevertheless, the newly-named Washington "ism" indicated the seriousness of the possibility that there might be a credible replacement for the Color School. The sense of Washington as a center for a significant, singular art—an art of painting, primarily—was again being articulated.

SELF-WORTH

New York's cavalcade of galleries, museums and hip neighborhoods was tempting to artists, but Washington offered freedom from the tyranny of the New York art world's culture of conformism —the alignment of galleries, critics, curators and collectors with the trends of the moment, which in the 1980s alternated between cool Postmodernism and hot Neo-Expressionism. What is more, the low-lying, vaguely European Capital City, with its serene, tree-lined streets and self-contained grandeur (with echoes of Paris or Vienna), lacked New York's frantic pace, visual aggression, physical claustrophobia and intense competition (no tens of thousands of artists, no SoHos, Madison Avenues or 57th Streets, no mega-influential publications). Washington allowed artists to take their time, to follow their own voices. The aura of the art community was comforting, condensed, open-hearted, almost small-town; studios spread from downtown into the suburbs and, on occasion, the Virginia and Maryland countryside.

Many influential personalities—"believers"—sometimes quietly, sometimes exuberantly, made things happen in the decade. Here are some of them, with apologies for omissions:

Collector/Patrons

Sandy and Jim Fitzpatrick, Mary and Jim Patton, Anita and Burton Reiner, Ira Lowe Esq. and Ella Tulin, Vivian and Elliot Pollock, Robert Lehrman, Anne and Ron Abramson, Elizabeth French, Norton Dodge, Heidi and Max Berry, Joshua Smith, Sherley and Bernard Koteen

Impresarios/Energizers

David Furchgott, Marc Zuver, Conrad and Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Don Russell and Helen Brunner, Bobby Lennon, Giorgio Furioso, Franz Bader, Chris Murray, Steve Weil, Michael Clark, Jack Rasmussen, Bill Dunlap, Janet Solinger

12. Joe Shannon's Maryland studio with his portrait (center) of Jane Livingston

Salonistas

Herb White, V.V. Rankine, Sal Fiorito, Alice Denney, Mary Swift, Olga Hirshhorn, JoAnn Crisp-Ellert and Bob Ellert, Livingston and Catherina Biddle

Artist-gurus

Anne Truitt, Lou Stovall, William Christenberry, Lois Mailou Jones, Gene Davis, Leon Berkowitz, Jeff Donaldson, Jacob Kainen, Sam Gilliam, Bill Woodward

Government-funding Whizzes

Lee Kimche, Renato Danese, Mary Ann Tighe, Donald Thalacker, Richard Boardman, Brian O'Doherty aka Patrick Ireland, Susan Lubowsky

Exhibition Visionaries and Brokers

Holly Block, Jim Demetrion, Frances Fralin, Charles Parkhurst, Angela Adams, Lenore Miller, Jane Livingston, Francoise Yohalem, Joe Shannon, Philip Brookman, Mary Anne Goley, Anne-Marie Pope, Ann Vandevanter, Kimberly Camp, Anne-Imelda Radice

Academics, Advocates, Artbookers

David Driskell, Cliff Chieffo, Duncan Tebow, Josephine Withers, Norma Broude, Mary Garrard, Marcella Brenner, Flo Davis, Skuta Helgison, Sabine Yanul

Critics, Stringers, Reporters, TV people

Paul Richard, Jo Ann Lewis, Benjamin Forgey, Lee Fleming, Frank Getlein, Martha McWilliams, Robert Aubrey Davis, Alice Thorson, Mike Giuliano, Iris Krasnow, Michael Welzenbach, Jacqueline Trescott, John Dorsey, JoAnna Shaw-Eagle, Joe Kelly, Mary Lynn Kotz, Hank Burchard, Kara Swisher, Gary Tischler, Sarah Grusin

13. A Washington vista from Robin Rose's studio on Columbia Road

14. Frank Di Perna (b. 1947) *Stone Slab—Art France*, 1980, Ektacolor print, 11 ¾ x 17 ½ inches on 16 x 20 inch paper, collection of the artist. Di Perna's close-in, Cézannesque view of a French hillside, included in Frances Fralin's influential "Images of the 1980s" Corcoran show of 1982, uses texture, tonality and man-on-the-moon anthropomorphism (can you spot it?) to suggest teeming nature. Mentored by Gary Winograd among others, the Pittsburgh-born photographer moved to Washington in 1974 to teach fine-arts photography, which had yet to embrace color.

Could it be that Washington's focused, committed, almost folksy art community fostered a sense of serenity, self-worth and purpose for artists in the studio—a spiritual rather than a material or competitive motivation—that translated into art objects? Whether rife with outside allusions (travel, childhood, literature, politics, mythology, nature), focused on homegrown culture (street life, families, the look of architecture) or tinged with psychological torment, the creation of these objects was buoyed by the best intentions of a community striving to make its way in a political town.

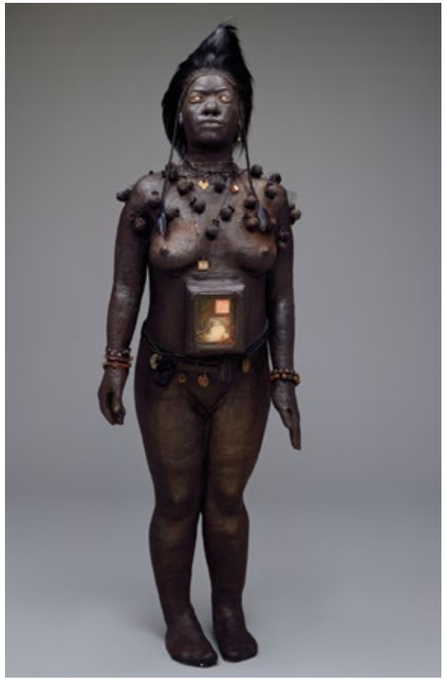
Consider also what D.C. artists were exposed to here, art-wise. The breadth of photography, for instance, included 19th- and 20th-century landscapes, figures, urban scenes and abstractions. Exposure to photography excelled in Washington

thanks to the Corcoran's commitment to the medium[18] via Jane Livingston's and Frances Fralin's carefully modulated programs of exhibitions, gallery talks and collection building. Innovative photographers on the faculty and elsewhere in the Washington area were plentiful (John Gossage, Steve Szabo, Mark Power, William Christenberry, William Eggleston and Frank di Perna), as were insightful dealers (Harry Lunn, Gerd Sander, Kathleen Ewing, Jo Tartt, the Kate Jones/Sally Troyer team, Sandra Berler, all nationally known, as well as newcomer Diane Brown who showed several young photographers on the national scene).[19]

Washington's museums were another factor. The spectrum of shows accelerated in the 1980s, among them Vermeer and American Luminism at the National Gallery, "Different Drummers" and Lucian Freud at the Hirshhorn and Black Folk Art and war photography at the Corcoran.

In 1987, non-Western holdings expanded via the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, with Asian art to supplement the Freer, and the National Museum of African Art, Warren Robbins's inventive, private Capitol Hill institution nationalized and relocated to prominence on the Mall, where its collection would influence such artists as Renee Stout.

Further revelations could be gleaned from the National Museum of Women in the Arts (which opened in 1987) and smaller institutions like the Textile Museum, Dumbarton Oaks with its ancient and pre-Colombian holdings and the Smithsonian's off-the-mall, black-oriented Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, whose new facility opened in 1987 with a show of D.C. artists Sam Gilliam, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, Keith Morrison and William T. Williams. Few self-respecting Washington artists, even those who made it their business to follow national art trends via progressive D.C. museum



15. Renee Stout (b. 1953), *Fetish #2*, 1988, mixed-media, 64 inches high, Dallas Museum of Art, Metropolitan Life Foundation Purchase Grant. Stout made this work three years after moving to Washington from her native Pittsburgh. African collections in both cities—the Carnegie Institute, where she studied, and the Mall museum originally on Capitol Hill—influenced the figure's tribal adornments, Bakongo-style stomach-box and ritualistic creation as a body cast of the artist herself. This powerful figure reflects Stout's lifelong interest in how Africa lives on in African-descended people. Domestic tableaux were next.

shows, New York's moveable feast, or coverage in the major periodicals, could ignore the deep wells of art right here at home, most of it steeped in handicraft and spiritual uplift.

BAD BOY ON THE BLOCK

Still, in the 1980s, the proposition that Washington could be the seedbed for a nationally significant art was a daring one, and it is no surprise that *The New Art Examiner* (which published Cameron's and Laget's articles, as noted previously) put forth the idea. This bad boy" of American art periodicals, with its main offices in Washington, repeatedly challenged conventional art-world wisdom, ignoring New York-centric issues and shows and running offbeat, gutsy, left-leaning articles (often using local authors) with impeccable timing.

The monthly publication ran assaults on Hilton Kramer's neo-conservatism and the mediocrity of Reagan-era collecting, an ahead-of-the-curve look into the surge of governmental art support in post-Franco Spain and, at decade's end, several deconstructions of conservative politics and the National Endowment for the Arts vis-à-vis the Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe firestorms. Readers who rolled their eyes at the very mention of Jacques Derrida were delighted.

Behind this kaleidoscopic-critical approach were the publication's feisty publisher Derek Guthrie and art-literate editor Jane Addams Allen (Guthrie's life partner named for the 19th-century social-reformer, an ancestral aunt). The couple, who had started the publication in Chicago in 1974, moved to D.C. in 1980 to expand its focus and "drill down into the essence of Washington art culture," in the words of frequent contributor J.W. Mahoney. The buzz of arts funding, aura of officialdom, breadth of museums and small but active art underground were irresistible to these two.

In the course of the decade, Guthrie and Allen (1935-2004) expanded the publication from tabloid to magazine format and opened offices in Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, London and, yes, New York. Seldom missing a D.C. art event, the two journalists were watchful, politically astute, argument-hungry (in the British Guthrie's case) and amazingly perceptive and articulate (in Allen's; she also wrote art criticism, ironically, for the politically conservative *Washington Times*.) The couple's presence

16. LEFT: Jane Addams Allen in 1988
17. RIGHT: Derek Guthrie in 1984

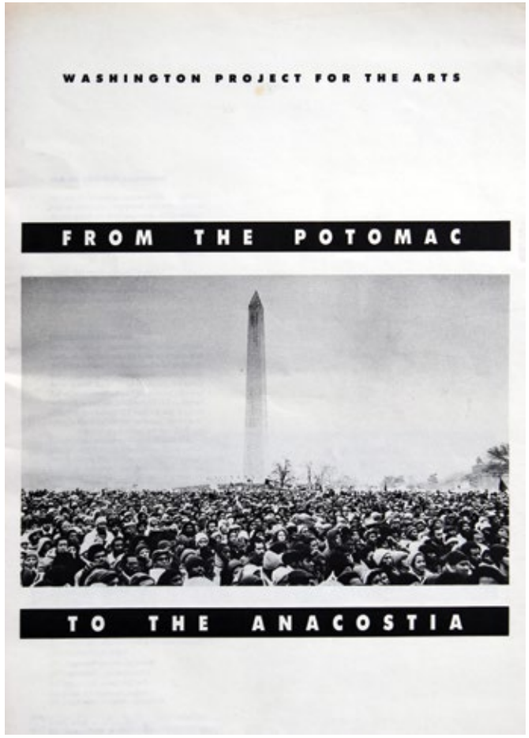
and the prestige and roller-coaster notoriety of their publication gave Washington art life a major jolt.[20] And so, increasingly, did the Washington Project for the Arts.

WPA STORMS THE BASTILLE

By mid-decade, WPA was booming with its street front "Bookworks" store of international artists' publications (launched in 1981) and partnerships with District Curators to bring Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and others to town. The art space's location gave art-world regulars accessibility to the 406 galleries and an ambiance much more urban, if such was your taste, than Dupont Circle. Wig shops, soul music stores, dilapidated storefronts and down-at-the-heels street life were a bit rare near the Phillips Collection. .

After Al Nodal left WPA in 1983, Jock Reynolds, a photo-artist from California, arrived as director with his artist-wife (and frequent collaborator) Suzanne Hellmuth. First, Reynolds hired John Ireland and Robert Wilhite, San Francisco conceptualists, to re-carve sections of the WPA structure into "artists' apartments"—a calming and thoughtful installation very different from the visual and thematic aggression of WPA's past projects. Nodal was a fireball, but the mild-mannered Reynolds was radical and politically astute in his own way, overseeing some of the most groundbreaking Washington shows

18. A classic cover of *New Art Examiner*



19. Powell's catalog. The illustration titled *We're with it, Washington* by Sharon Farmer

of the decade. "War and Memory," a photo and installation show of 1987, rekindled long-buried memories of tragedy and graphic violence of the Vietnam War which had ended a dozen years before and had been largely experienced through TV.

Reynolds then opened WPA's exhibition schedule to shows themed to what we'd now call "diversity." The revelatory "Art in Washington and its Afro-American presence, 1940-1970," a 1985 project of painter-writer-curator Keith Morrison. This extensive exhibition probed the interconnections among Color School tenets, African art, Barnett-Aden Gallery's multiracial stable of artists and the work of black painters like Alma Thomas and David Driskell (like Morrison, a multi-talented individual who taught African-American art history at the University of Maryland, where a scholarship and research center is named in his honor).

In 1989, newly appointed WPA curator-scholar Rick Powell presented "From the Potomac to the Anacostia: Art and Ideology in the Washington Area", a racially-mixed exhibition for a racially-divided city, marrying such works as Cheryl Casteen and Charles Flickinger's "Bird Woman" with African-American hair-braid designs by Fana. Powell's nationally focused "Blues Esthetic: Black Culture and Modernism," later in 1989, presented a whole new take on "black" American painting, which in the case of David Hammons's mural-size portrait of Jesse Jackson as a blue-eyed white man[21] could be pretty hard-hitting. Few other art spaces in town, with the possible exception of Mark Zuver's Fondo Del Sol on R Street, with a mostly Caribbean/Latino agenda and an openness to African-American expressions, confronted race so directly.[22]

AIDS AND WASHINGTON ART LIFE

In the early years of the AIDS epidemic, national artists such as Keith Haring, Robert Mapplethorpe and Paul Thek of New York, and Roger Brown of Chicago, would be infected with the virus and eventually die. What about Washington? Tom Pattison was a studio model for British-born D.C. painter/critic Andrew Hudson. Pattison, whom Hudson remembers as "like a brother to me," nursed friends through AIDS in the 1980s and then himself died of the disease.

This author recalls the loss of several art acquaintances. The dynamic Jack Bolton, who had just left Washington to establish himself as a curator for a New York bank, committed suicide after receiving the diagnosis. Richard Boardman, an effusive, witty individual whose job was to send exhibitions abroad for the State Department, made ironic jokes about his health, sold his eccentric cache of worldly goods, and withdrew to Sydney, which he loved, to die among Australians. Michael Watson, an elegant, smart *Americain-de-couleur* who worked down the hall in the Hirshhorn's Registrar's Office, reported on his various ailments to coworkers, with disbelief but matter-of-factly, made up a will (at barely 30) and eventually stayed home to die.

20. Jody Mussoff, *Woman Dyes Her Hair,* 1981, colored pencil drawing, 22 x 30 inches, Art Gallery of the University of Maryland. Mussoff's work — part Egon Schiele nude, part Punk wailer, part manic caricature—projects uncertainty and anxiety despite the mundane subject. The Pittsburgh-born artist came to Washington as an art student in 1974, and remained. The surge of figurative expressionism and women's subjects during the 1980s—plus the ease with which her work could be transported—allowed Mussoff also to show in New York and Europe. An AIDS Zeitgeist inflects her vision.

21. Artists and allies march from the Corcoran to the Capitol steps, June 1989

AIDS left many more holes in Washington art life, but since the disease was seldom named in obituaries, the full extent may never be known. The pall of AIDS may also have turned up in local artworks, but that, too, is elusive (ACT-UP, which recruited artists, was a New York cause). But worth noting is that early in the epidemic, in 1985, Gallery K held an art sale to benefit the health-care response to AIDS. Jody Mussoff, one of Washington's most angst-y figurative artists, co-organized it with gallery director Komei Wachi. One hundred and thirty Washington artists donated works, each priced at $100, and the exhibition sold out. Thus Mussoff and Wachi were able to present the Whitman-Walker Clinic, a gay men's health center facing new AIDS cases almost daily, with a check for $13,000.[23]

Artists and buyers had been generous and compassionate, but the epidemic raged on, and before long, Christian Coalition conservatives, like Senator Jesse Helms, would rail against expressions of sexuality, gender and religious beliefs in contemporary art. The Culture Wars raged on too.

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE—THE DEFINING MOMENT

In the first months of 1989, Senator Helms and others on the Hill were condemning the NEA for its support of a North Carolina exhibition that included "Piss Christ," Andres Serrano's surreal, large-scale, yellowish photograph of a crucifix in urine, which they felt to be blasphemous. The Corcoran's new Director, Christina Orr-Cahall, was watchful.[24] Robert Mapplethorpe's "X Portfolio" photographs depicting sadomasochistic gay sex—shadowy images not for the faint of heart[25] — were to be included in "Robert Mapplethorpe: the Perfect Moment," a retrospective opening that June at the Corcoran. Would they fan right-wing extremism on the Hill and thereby jeopardize the Corcoran's partial reliance on federal funds? Orr-Cahall must have feared as much, so in what she no doubt felt was an astute political move, and with the backup of a narrow Board quorum, she canceled the exhibition.

The decision created a firestorm. The art world, joined by the Left, cried censorship and organized protests while the Right, driven by homophobia and an anti-pornography agenda,[26] added Mapplethorpe (who had died of AIDS a few months before) to its blacklist of artists. Orr-Cahall was vilified by the art

community for her bad judgment, and Jane Livingston, the Corcoran's valued curator, resigned in protest.

Courageous acts abounded. Jock Reynolds cleared WPA's galleries to open the entire exhibition in July, including, behind panels, the "X Portfolio," and record crowds came. And on June 30, the very night the exhibition was to have opened at the Corcoran, a small coterie of art undergrounders saw to it that thirteen of Mapplethorpe's photographs—portraits, still lifes and figure studies, some homoerotic but none from the X-portfolio—were projected onto the museum's façade.

The Mapplethorpe projection, now legendary, was the brainchild of Rockne Krebs, Ruth Bolduan and Mokha Laget from the Washington Artists' Coalition, independent curator Andrea Pollan (a new arrival in town who came up with the projection idea "in casual conversation," she recalls), curator-artist J. W. Mahoney and art patron/restaurateur Bill Wooby. In the back room of Wooby's Collector Gallery Restaurant on U Street, the group worked into the wee hours on the complex logistics of permits, equipment, fundraising and publicity, expecting, on projection night, perhaps 250 people.

All the same, an estimated 2,000 people showed up—artists, curators, collectors, dealers, critics, TV crews, museum staffers, officials from the National Endowment for the Arts (which had helped fund the exhibition), gay activists, AIDS activists, civil libertarians and many, many more. An art-world event had turned into a broadly galvanizing, freedom-of-expression demonstration — the perfect us-versus-them situation — generating page one news around the nation and beyond. Art became a *cause célèbre*, not in New York, London, L.A., Tokyo or other "excitement cities" of the 1980s but in staid, colonnaded Washington, D.C.

WHAT NEXT?

The explosive spirit of the Mapplethorpe moment was never again quite equaled. Chill and retrenchment soon extinguished the excitement. The Hirshhorn, Corcoran and NEA began to pay more careful attention to contemporary art with a potential to offend; they adjusted accordingly. Galleries, tripped up by a recession in 1989, lost business and slowed their expansion.[27] The "earlier organic, interconnected, fond, and feuding scene," as Lee Fleming has put it,[28] faded away as the art world

scattered and regrouped in smaller, mostly but not always, respectful fiefdoms. And although artists kept active in their studios—as they always do—the celebratory polemic of a nationally distinctive Washington art and the certainty that "we are trustees of our culture," as the Washington Artists' Coalition proclaimed in 1988,[29] eventually dissipated.

The painter-curator Mokha Laget, who had championed a cohesive Washington art for the 1980s, offers this closing assessment[30]:

In the wake of the Color School, D.C. needed to emerge and find its own way. But no true critical discourse followed in the decades after Clement Greenberg had put his stamp on the chosen few. The fear and loathing of regionalism loomed large back then, and it was seen as a curse, not an attribute. Still, there was plenty of electricity in the air, especially at the height of the Culture Wars. But ultimately, Washington's conservative veneer, big money, slow power and absence of any real urban art hub were what prevailed. Awakening Washington to its own artistic identity was, as we say in French, like stabbing water with a sword.

NOTES

1 This paragraph opens a draft essay submitted for this project, then withdrawn by Mr. Mahoney because of a long-standing commitment as curator/catalog essayist for the WPA "Catalyst" exhibition at the Katzen's American University Museum (see Further Reading). The current essay follows Mr. Mahoney's path and borrows a few choice phrases, with gratitude. Uncited quotations are from this draft.

2 Joseph McLellan, "Enigmatic Empire," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1981, D9. Carolyn Campbell, the Corcoran's PR person at the time, recalls that Longo's girlfriend Cindy Sherman, the photographer, participated as a dancer, along with Arnie Zane and Bill. T. Jones (pictured). It was a School project that the *Washington Review's* Mary Swift helped make happen.

3 Also part of the series: Corcoran professor-alumnus Tom Green's sharp, imagist-y paintings and works by Corcoran alumni Kendall Buster and Peter Fleps

4 *Options '83*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, January 21 – March 5, 1983, p. 4.

5 Irving Gordon, quoted in Michael Welzenbach, "Putting on the Ritz," *Washington Post* , April 12, 1983, D7

6 Sarah Booth Conroy, "Art in the Raw," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1983, G1

7 American Alpine Club, *Accidents in North American Mountaineering 1985,* volume 5, issue 2, number 38. (See "In Print" section in Album).

8 Jean Lawlor Cohen adds that Troyer was an accomplished potter, Jones a serious collector and member of the deMenil-Schlumberger family and Fitzpatrick the co-author of a cultural history of black D.C.

9 In 1983, 1986 and 1988, respectively. See Jo Ann Lewis, "Hello SoHo: The DC Art Dealer Exodus," *Washington Post,* Sept 18, 1988, C14. Also setting up shop in New York, eventually permanently, was Franklin Parrasch, a dealer in fine woodwork and craft art.

10 The 930 Club, d.c. space and other venues fostered Washington's hyper-active Punk/New Wave music scene during the period. See Cynthia Connolly, Leslie Clague and Sharon Chaslow, *Banned in D.C.: Photographs and Anecdotes from the D.C. Punk Underground, 1979-1985* and the Corcoran's ephemera and film clip exhibition of Winter 2013, *Pump Me Up,* which focused on both Punk and D.C.'s Go Go music scene in the 1980s.

11 Paul Richard, "Grand Opening," *Washington Post*, September 28, 1985, G2. Jean Cohen notes that at times McIntosh-Drysdale took important pieces on consignment from dealers like Leo Castelli.
12 Thomas Lawson, "Horrorshow," *New Art Examiner* (July 1985): 24
13 Lee Fleming, "Washington Show, *Art News* (Oct. 1985), p. 13
14 Paul Richard, "Contrasts at the Corcoran: Rifts and Revelations at the Washington Show," *Washington Post,* May 11, 1985, G1.
15 Dan Cameron, "Is There Hope for Art in Washington?", *New Art Examiner (*March 1988): 34.
16 Paul Richard, "Gathering Forces: DC's Lightning Bolt." *Washington Post,* Sept. 12, 1989, E2
17 Mokha Laget, ""Vision and Revision in DC Art," *New Art Examiner* (February 1989): 31, 33-34.
18 Started in the 1970s by Jane Livingston after a pow-wow with Lee Friedlander and others to build on Washington's past as a locus for news and documentary photography and make the Corcoran a center for "modern and contemporary photography." Conversation with the author, Nov. 4, 2011
19 Ewing, who represented many local photographers, co-founded the Association of Photography Art Dealers (APAD) in 1981—as AIPAD (adding "International") it still presents yearly shows in New York — and went on to become President. Sander, who relocated to New York in 1983, was a pioneer international dealer along with Harry Lunn (see Margaret Loke, "Photography Review: A Collector Who Knew How to Beat the Drum and Sound the Trumpet," *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 2011.., D.14).
Tartt helped to champion 19th -century photography, Jones and Troyer also came to be much admired for their keen photographic eyes, and Berler, working from a Bethesda gallery space, kept DC photography collectors well stocked with works by major figures. Brown, remembered perhaps best today as a sculpture dealer, also sold work by such up-and-coming national photographers as Leland Rice and James Casabere.
20 Guthrie and Allen, who stopped writing for the *Washington Times* in 1989, left DC in 1995 to settle in Cornwall, England. They married in 1996. *The New Art Examiner* ceased publication in 2002, two years before Allen died of cancer.
21 "How Ya Like Me Now?" now part of the Glenstone Foundation collection, Potomac, Maryland.
22 Ned Rifkin, the Hirshhorn's Chief Curator from 1986-91, pushed for solo exhibitions by African-American artists. "Houston Conwill WORKS" (1988), a site-specific installation curated by the present writer, started the process. A number of solo shows and acquisitions followed, but the first black show to be curated by an African-American staffer did not happen until 2000, when Senior Educator Teresia Bush (now Adjunct Professor at Howard University) curated "Directions: Leonardo Drew."
23 Telephone conversation with Mussoff, November 2011. (see also *Washington Post* coverage via ProQuest as cited in Further Reading). Some years later, the New York-based American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR) staged a fundraising auction (see Further Reading), with mixed success.
24 Before coming to Washington from California, Orr-Cahall was director of the Art Division of the Oakland Museum, a city-funded institution in this largely black metropolis across the bay from San Francisco. There she cancelled a scheduled exhibition of Robert Colescott's racially charged paintings, as reported to this author by Harvey L. Jones, Senior Curator at the time.
25 Even Mapplethorpe's closest friend, singer-poet Patti Smith, was mystified and repelled by the elegantly printed X-Portfolio, which represented Mapplethorpe's deepening fascination with secret desire. See Patti Smith, *Just Kids*, New York: Harper Collins, 2011, pp. 235-36.
26 Thomas Birch, "Introduction: The Raw Nerve of Politics," in Jennifer A. Peter and Louis M. Crosier, eds., *The Cultural Battlefield: Arts Censorship and Public Funding*, Gilsum, N.H.: 1995, p. 16.
27 Telephone conversation with Bill Wooby, November 2011. A Wikipedia article, "The Early 1990s Recession," reports more generally on this downturn, which started with a "Black Monday" in 1987 and extended globally to the mid-1990s.
28 Lee Fleming, "Then and Now: Afterword," in *The Constant Artist* , exhibition catalog, 2011, American University Museum at the Katzen, p. 43.
29 Rockne Krebs, "Opening Remarks," in Mokha Laget, ed. *The 1988 Artists Congress at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 24 and 25 sponsored by the Coalition of Washington Artists* [publication described in *Further Reading and Looking*].
30 Email to the author, Nov. 5, 2011

Voices, Observations, Chat

1980S PART 2

EDITED BY SIDNEY LAWRENCE

VIGNETTES

J. W. Mahoney: A few fond, random impressions. A WPA opening with Gene Davis downstairs and Yuriko Yamaguchi, Jeff Spaulding and Betsy Packard upstairs. The Examiners' lead singer Michael Reidy enters WPA's Botswana Club. The No-Name Discussion Group meeting in Carol Goldberg's Connecticut Avenue studio. Tuesday night openings at the Olshonsky Gallery. Hilary Daley-Hynes discusses Uranus Transits in his Atlas Building conservation studio. The Mapplethorpe Demonstration. The "Other Rooms" show at the Morgan Annex. Tom Downing and Simon Gouverneur together at the Phillips in 1985—the passing of a torch.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Tebow: The indefatigable Sal Fiorito—glass artist, performance artist, restaurant designer, party organizer and longtime friend of my husband and me—had "Camp Fioritos" over several summers at his property near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Fifty to 100 "campers" came each time and pitched tents near his cottage. Sal roasted a pig, and we brought side dishes. Guests could float on rafts in the nearby river, but getting involved in a group art project was the main reason to go. One year we made a balloon bridge to cross the river, and once, to celebrate Bastille Day, we wore berets and penciled-on mustaches and assembled in a cornfield enthusiastically waving French flags much to the bewilderment of the pilot of an ultra light who happened to by flying by. Sal's Halloween costume parties were equally wild. At one, he dressed up as Jesus on the cross, at another he sewed live worms onto a body suit and at a third he was a turtle in a terrarium.

Sidney Lawrence: Then there were the sweaty, rock-out dance parties—Motown redux!—at Alan Stone and Sherry Jones's Edwardian digs near Dupont Circle with artists, film/TV people and who knows who else, plus Mary Swift's undergrounder blasts in her modernist house in (otherwise Ye Olde) Georgetown with art, art and more art, and music, too. Hirshhorn openings were great—drawing celebs like Liv Ullman and Diane Keaton, as well as the usual "groupies." I liked the loud, decked-out, party-loving artists the best (hello, Judy Jashinsky!). And the characters like that older, hungry, always alone bearded older guy who never uttered a word, or the eccentric, classy JoAnn Crisp-Ellert in her ethnic outfits with her husband Bob, dashingly Princetonian in every detail, or the beret-clad, ever-interested Barry Alpert, or the intense-to-the-*max New Art Examiner* editors Jane Allen and Derek Guthrie, stalking Washington's art world with the acuity of old-line European intellectuals.

1. PREVIOUS: Hirshhorn fun, circa 1980—staffers Carol Parsons, John Beardsley and Sidney Lawrence pose with some cool-looking art-world dudes. Darkroom dental "adjustments" to Parsons and Lawrence, the Hirshhorn's de-facto Fun Couple, add further hilarity to the picture. The fright wig is real.

BOONS

Mokha Laget: Jane and Derek came to shows, wrote reviews and articles, brought in some heavy hitters to write from the outside, pushed the discourse with artists, poked and prodded to stimulate the scene. They took on the Culture Wars.; D.C. was ground zero. They were not in it for the money or the glory. Their presence in Washington was considered more of a thorn in the *beau monde*'s side than the catalyst for wider cultural understanding.

Derek Guthrie: Jane and I launched *The New Art Examiner* in Chicago, where our independence, tolerance, politics and openness of spirit were sometimes embraced, sometimes demonized. The publication could find little financial backing in Chicago but our national stature was growing, so expansion was necessary. Al Nodal at WPA suggested D.C. would be a positive move. The charm of the city and its museums were an enticement, as well as the proximity to New York. The other consideration, particularly for me, was the National Endowment for the Arts, where the thorny

2. Sal Fiorito in the 1990s

3. Souvenir T-shirt, 1989

4. Mary Swift soirée, ca. 1980—Robin Rose on synthesizer, vocalist Roddy Frantz, drummer Danny Frankel and guitarists Linda France and Robert Goldstein AKA The Urban Verbs celebrate their first record contract with Warner Brothers. Backup by Tom Downing and Ellsworth Kelly.

arena of art politics—the U.S. government rewarding and, therefore, shaping artistic expression—could be a cogent and consistent editorial focus.

Clarissa Wittenberg: The Washington Review had artists reviewing artists, writers reviewing fiction, poets thrilled to have a place to publish, great interviews with artists and regular profiles of Poet Laureates of the Library of Congress. Mary Swift brought her energy and deep knowledge of the arts, as well as her camera and pen. E. Ethelbert Miller, the great poet, was senior editor. We learned as we went, using a large format for strong images, and talked to everyone, joined in on activities, wrote about people who were not yet widely known—Bill Warrell, Al Carter, Rockne Krebs, Peter Sellars (the director), Martin Puryear and others. We made sure that people learned there was a lot of creativity burning under the stolid surface of this one-company political town.

Jean Lawlor Cohen: The 80s, in retrospect, were a good time for us freelance writers. I covered Francophile topics (from Duncan Phillips to visiting performers) for *France*, published here still by the embassy. I also wrote for *Sculpture*, the ongoing national publication produced by the International Sculpture Center, its headquarters then on a cobblestone alley in Georgetown. Key people were ISC director David Furchgott, editor Penny Kiser and resident critics like Eric Gibson, who became art critic for *The Washington Times* and later editor of *Art News*. Whenever we could, we pushed to cover D.C. artists like Bill Christenberry, Larry Kirkland, Eric Rudd and Jim Sanborn.

No doubt *Museum&Arts Washington* made the biggest impact, because it reviewed so many gallery shows and profiled artists and dealers. Thanks to high-end advertisers, publisher Anne Abramson had fine art direction, good paper stock and insightful editors like Jamie Loftin, Jeff Stein, Lee Fleming and Sarah Grusin. She paid for photo shoots by people like Tom Wolff, Max MacKenzie and Mary Noble Ours.

I edited reviews for awhile and, on the writer mast with me, were, among others, Florence Gilbard, Florence Rubenfeld (biographer of Clement Greenberg), John Beardsley, Susan Tamulevich, Mary Gabriel and Mary Lynn Kotz. Many still bemoan the loss of our glam *M&AW*, but an economic downturn caused it to cease publication after six years in 1991.

Sidney Lawrence: Bloggish, grassroots publications like *Ken Oda's Art Newsletter* aka *KOAN* (2013 Newsflash: Koan is a Zen Buddhist term for paradox-based enlightenment. Who knew?), which painter Robyn Johnson-Ross wrote for, perceptively, *The Washington Artists News* (good interviews) and *Eyewash* (reviews) rounded out the terrain, with newspaper coverage, of course. There was a lot to write about during this decade, but the boom year, in terms of sculpture at least, has to have been 1980.

David Furchgott: The Eleventh International Sculpture Conference opened in June 1980. With less than a year to plan and implement, it was a cliff-hanger, but through the hard work of many, lots of good fortune and a prudent trimming of the budget, we pulled it off, taking over the U.S. capital with sculpture talks, area-wide exhibitions and celebrity figures like Richard Serra, Beverly Pepper, Christo and Isamu Noguchi who came to town to join 162 speakers, panelists and workshop leaders, plus Nancy Holt, Lita Albuquerque, our own Rockne Krebs and others, who created site-specific works. SC11, as we called it, attracted 2700-plus visitors, occasioned an 88-sculpture exhibition throughout Washington's core (including Seward Johnson's ever-popular *The Awakening*) and

5. Gay Glading and Kevin MacDonald read their favorite rag.

galvanized some 60 community art spaces to organize their own shows. The National Endowment for the Arts helped fund us; Joan Mondale, the Vice President's wife, was honorary chair and the installations and conference were covered by hundreds of newspapers nationally. The city was high on sculpture.

Duncan Tebow: Spurred by David and emboldened by the Conference, we started the Washington Sculptors Group in 1983. Leonard Cave was the first president, then I was, then Joan Danziger. In a few years, our original 100 members rose to 225. In co-sponsorship with museums, embassies and other organizations, we presented technical talks, art history lectures, "what-I-did-on-my-summer-vacation" type evenings and programs in tune with the times like "site-specific-sculptor-disillusionment" night with a GSA official who revealed that Richard Serra signed a contract that allowed the government to move, even destroy, *Tilted Arc*. And, of course, we sponsored regular sculpture exhibitions chosen by reputable, independent jurors. The goals were, and still are, to keep Washington's thriving sculpture scene in the public eye and foster its professionalism and growth.

STYLES

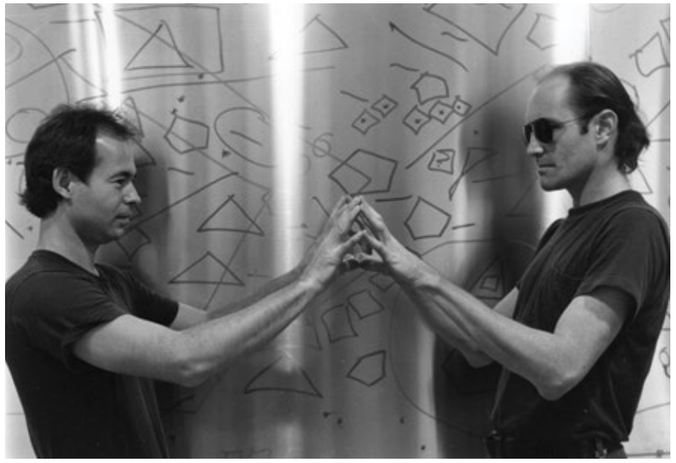
Sidney Lawrence: My style, as part of scores of "emerging" and/or active artists in the 1980s, was *Preppy Primitive*. Or so a sound-bite-crazy friend of mine called it; I understood since I worked at the time as the Hirshhorn's PR guy. Now it's my turn. So with apologies for flippancy, inaccuracy and probable irritation to you, fellow artists, here are some '80s styles I've invented for fun and nostalgia: *Redneck realism* (Fred Folsom). *Solid-Figure-ism* (Rebecca Davenport, Judy Jashinsky, Joe Shannon, Robyn Johnson-Ross, Betsy Packard). *Hallucinato-Figure-ism* (Carol Goldberg, Margo Humphrey, Lisa Brotman, Hilary Daley Hynes, Eric Rudd, Keith Morrison, Ruth Bolduan). *Spiky-Figure-ism* (John Antone, Rebecca Kamen). *Jesuito-Intellectuo-Hermeticism* (Brian Kavanagh, Jim Mahoney). *Dwellingism* (Tom Nakashima, Alan Stone, Billy Dunlop) *Icono-Culturo-Patternism* (Simon Gouverneur, Mokha Laget). *Hallucinato-Abstractionism* (Anne Marchand, Benita Berman, Joanne Kent). *Identity-as-Symbiosis-ism* (Ed Love, Mindy Weisel, Renee Stout, Yuriko Yamaguchi, Maxine Cable). *Globalisto-Yearningism* (Richard Dana). *Homeland Yearningism* (William Christenberry). *Yearningism* (Gayil Nalls). *Dollism* (Suzanne Codi, Noche Christ). *Duckism* (Bill Suworoff). *Sign-o-the-Times-ism* (Susan Firestone). *Chaste-ism* (Dale Haven Loy). *Trompe-ism* (Mark Clark). *Paint-as-Trompe-ism* (Sam Gilliam). *Serenism* (Nan Montgomery). *Anxietyism* (Jody Mussoff). *Silhouette-ism* (Catherine Batza). *Culture-as-Earth-ism* (Martha Jackson-Jarvis). *Compare-and-contrast-ism* (Susan Eder). *Neat-yet-Offkilterism* (Lee Haner, Rex Weil, Gay Glading). *Over-the-top Vernacularism* (Ed Bisese, Elaine Langerman, Wayne Paige, Joan Danziger).

And more: *Muscle-ism* (John Van Alstine, Lenny Cave, Foon Sham). *Squiggle-ism* (Janis Goodman). *Dare-to-Wear-Me-ism* (Maria da Conceicao/Sao). Crispo-Organico-Imagism (Tom Green, Steve Kruvant, Ann Stoddard, Steve Cushner, William Willis). *Introverto-Obsessionism* (Andrea Way, Wayne Edson Bryan). *Extraverto-Obsessionism* (W.C. Richardson). *Inner-Glow-ism* (Robin Rose). *Take-on-the-Modernists-ism* (Duncan Tebow). *Emulate-the-modernists-ism* (Hildy Van Roijen). *Messy-yet-Logical-ism* (E. H. Sorrells-Adawale, Jeff Spaulding, John Dixon). *Brute-Delicatism* (John McCarty). *Steel-as-Bloom-ism* (Wendy Ross). *Retro-Revivo-Statue-ism* (Tom Mullany, John Dreyfuss, Raymond Kaskey, Frederick Hart, David Mordini). *Photo-Lumiere-ism* (Manon Cleary, Kevin MacDonald, Joe White, Alan Sonneman, Michael Clark, A. Brockie Stevenson, Barbara Frank). *Hit-Them-in-the-Face-ism—Politico branch* (Leslie Kuter, Judy Byron, Akili Ron Anderson, Lawley Paisley-Jones, Jeff Donaldson) *& Expressionisto branch* (Sal Fiorito, Sherman Fleming/Rod Force, Jenna Watson). *Non-Neo-Neo* (Al Carter, Edward Knippers, Sylvia Snowden). *Internalized Flirtationism* (Carroll Sockwell, Ruth Balduan, Walter Kravitz). *Spacio-Mysticalo-Involvementism* (Renee Butler, Kendall

6. Jody Mussoff and Brian Kavanagh make happy at a Hirshhorn opening

7. "Big Al" Carter and Carroll Sockwell at ease

8. Renee Butler installing *VARIATIONS 1* for the John Cage Fest at Strathmore Hall Mansion



9. Robin Rose and Kevin MacDonald face to face

10. Maria da Conceicao ("Sao") in her wearable-art workshop

11. John Gossage and Alex Castro making photo prints

Buster). *Wisp-of-memory-ism* (Michael Platt, Frank di Perna, Denise Ward Brown, Joyce Tennyson, John Figura, Mark Power).

And finally: *Love-of-Land-ism* (Peter Fleps, Bill Dunlap, Steve Szabo, Athena Tacha, Patricia Tobacco Forrester, Jim Sanborn). *Love-of-City-ism* (Val Lewton, Michael Francis, Lily Spandorf, Zinnia, Shirley True, Bill d'Italia, Lily Spandorf). *Fascination-with-People-ism* (Annette Polan, Mary Swift, Paul Feinberg, Lloyd Wolf). *Watch-us-have-a-blast-ism* (Art Attack). And now for something completely different:

Richard Powell (curatorial categories, 1989): A. Systems and Grid. Art that emanates from what might be described as the city's origins in diagrammatic abstraction...B. Washington Organica. The antithesis of order... C. Faces-Places...related to realism, but with an edge... D. Inside/Outside. Art that is really life, made by black folk.... E. History-turned-into-Fodder-for-Art, Work that doesn't let memorials, marble pillars, gilded frames and other Washington albatrosses overwhelm it.

BLACK

Keith Morrison (1981): Can art make Reagan a humanitarian? I don't think black artists think that way. James Baldwin said that social change in art has to do with a black kid looking at a black kid and thinking him beautiful. We're interested in a cultural cohesiveness, a sense of who we are as a people, what your image is, what is beautiful to you.. . . I don't know of a black artist who does not believe fervently that politics is a central aspect of art.

Teresia Bush: In the 1970s, such fair-minded communicators as the Corcoran's Roy Slade and Walter Hopps fostered an open, friendly, liberal atmosphere, but in the 1980s, the whole political aroma of this city changed. People went back into their little corners. Except for the WPA and Fondo del Sol, which made concerted efforts, you didn't see many mixed shows in D.C., or curatorial interest in black artists, or even mixed openings. And we're just now getting over it. Even so, some outstanding African-Americans artists either emerged or held their ground during the decade. Sylvia Snowden, Ed Love, Starmanda Bullock, Franklin White, Percy Martin, Margo Humphrey, Frank Smith, Joyce Wellman, Akili Ron Anderson, Joseph Holston, Stephanie Pogue, Jeff Donaldson, Uzeki Allan Nelson, Al Carter, Michael Platt and Martha Jackson-Jarvis are some of them.

Richard Powell (1989): Two artistic forbearers, visionary sculptor James Hampton [see 1965 Retrospective entry] and sign-art surrealist Ric Roberts, suggest that the formulation for a local/black/grassroots arts movement runs long and deep. We in the cultural arena should recognize the fact that the citizens who suffer most from the city's social ills—crime, poverty, unemployment—are also the source of a rich and expressive culture, one which should rightfully share a place among our artistic offerings.

NEW YORK

Ben Forgey (1985): New York's weighty presence so close by contributes to a certain inertia, if not fatalism, in the D.C. art scene. . . It contributes to a defensive local identity crisis and to the pejorative edge many perceive in the words "local art" or "Washington art" . . .

Max Protetch (1988): If you want to challenge yourself, there's no test in Washington, D.C. Art is peripheral activity there; it is central in New York.

Chris Middendorf (1988): The quality of life is better here, though New York clearly has its advantages. . ... And we don't have fashion here. In New York, the tide sweeps people away...

Barbara Fendrick (1988): [In New York] everybody's interested in who's new.

12. Inside Fondo Del Sol on R Street, a singular showcase for art of the Americas and the African diaspora

13. Martha Jackson-Jarvis's 1983 installation for WPA, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon, Walking on Sunshine*, borrowed its title from jazz and soul lyrics and encouraged viewers to move through a pleasurable environment of raku sculpture, neon and sand.

Jane Addams Allen (1985): The dense, gritty claustrophobic urbanism that drives artists in New York . . . to cluster together in self-created ghettoes is largely absent here.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Richard Powell (1988): Anacostia artist John Robinson is of more importance to D.C. than Paul Gauguin because of his proximity to us.

Sue Green (1988): Enough of this cliché that this is a cultural wasteland; it's not. . . . What happens is burnout. Somehow, the enthusiasm dissipates.

Robin Rose (1988): Washington will never have an economic base to support art the way all of us would like to think.

Jane Addams Allen (1985): Groups of artists rise and fall here, for the most part without geographical center and without notice.

Rex Weil (1985): Making art in Washington is not easy. . . We make art side by side with those who fashion an increasingly unpleasant political and social context. . . Art here should be toughened and purified by daily confrontation with the hardest questions about what we are doing and why.

Dan Cameron (1989): People in Washington should stop hibernating so much; they might find that artists (and their functionaries) tend to come up with remarkable ideas when they gather in groups larger than two.

Gene Davis (1981): . . . make no mistake, each [artist] . . . is a solitary voyager.

14. Michael Platt arranges works on paper in the 1990s. His 1986 WPA installation focused on the Atlanta child murders of 1979-81, which claimed 28 young black lives.

SOURCES*

*see *Further Reading & Looking* for full citations not given here.
VIGNETTES: Mahoney—unpublished essay draft. Tebow—correspondence to editor. BOONS: Laget, Guthrie, Wittenberg, Tebow—correspondence to editor. STYLES: Powell—*From the Potomac to the Anacostia: Art & Ideology in the Washington Area* [p. 2], BLACK: Bush—correspondence to editor. Powell—op. cit. [p. 10]. Morrison—Paul Richard, interviewer, "Black Artists: Their Pride and Problems: Keith Morrison," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1981, G1. NEW YORK: Forgey—"Making Art in Washington," in *The Washington Show*, p. 22. Protetch, Middendorf, Fendrick—quoted in Jo Ann Lewis, "Hello SoHo! The D.C. Art Dealer Exodus," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1988, C1, C4. Allen—"A Starting Point: Refracted Light and Received Values in Washington Art," in *The Washington Show*, p 24. IDENTITY CRISIS: Powell, Green and Rose—*The 1988 Artist's Congress at the Corcoran Gallery of Art*, pp.23, 7-8 and 10, respectively. Allen—"A Starting Point" The Washington Show, p. 25. Weil—"The Washington Show—An Artist's View" in *The Washington Show*, p. 39. Cameron—"Is there Hope for Art in Washington?", *New Art Examiner* (March 1988): p. 37. Davis—Options '81, Washington Project for the Arts, April 17 - May 18, 1981 [p.4], in reference to the 20 artists he and Mary Swift chose as co-curators.