



Erika Rothenberg's anti-media room features "The Celebrity Simulator" in the home of Jack (pictured) and Patrice Waldner.

# Home Is Where the Art Is

by Josef Woodard

**E**ven on a sweltering Sunday during the Labor Day weekend, intrepid bands of house hunters were on the prowl. Braving 102 degree heat, they wandered around neighborhoods looking for the last great deal on Santa Barbara real estate. But on this particular Sunday, an equally determined but milder-mannered group was making the rounds of quite a different group of houses. Instead of newspaper classifieds, they were clutching art catalogues. "Did you see the Farmer house?" they would ask one another. "All the doors were taken off." They were

patrons of the Home Show, one of the most ambitious and unique art shows ever exhibited in Santa Barbara.

For the next five weeks, you too can join in on the expedition, and for \$12—the price of the beautiful and elaborate catalogue—you can gain entrance to 10 Santa Barbara homes that have been turned over to international artists to do with what they will. And you'll find a lot more than homes with all the doors piled in the living room . . .

The Contemporary Arts Forum, which organized this event, has long been interested in the shifting definitions of where art belongs. In the past, the CAF has sponsored elaborately conjured gallery environments and site-specific installations around town that have stretched strict notions of art placement. But with the Home Show, the CAF has definitely crossed a new boundary. "One of the things we wanted to do was put artists in a context they're not used to," explained Betty Klausner, CAF director and the show's spark plug. "Rather than a studio, a gallery, or a museum, we wanted to see how a home environment would affect what they did."

But there is more at stake than new art spaces. Property itself is on view. "We thought about calling the

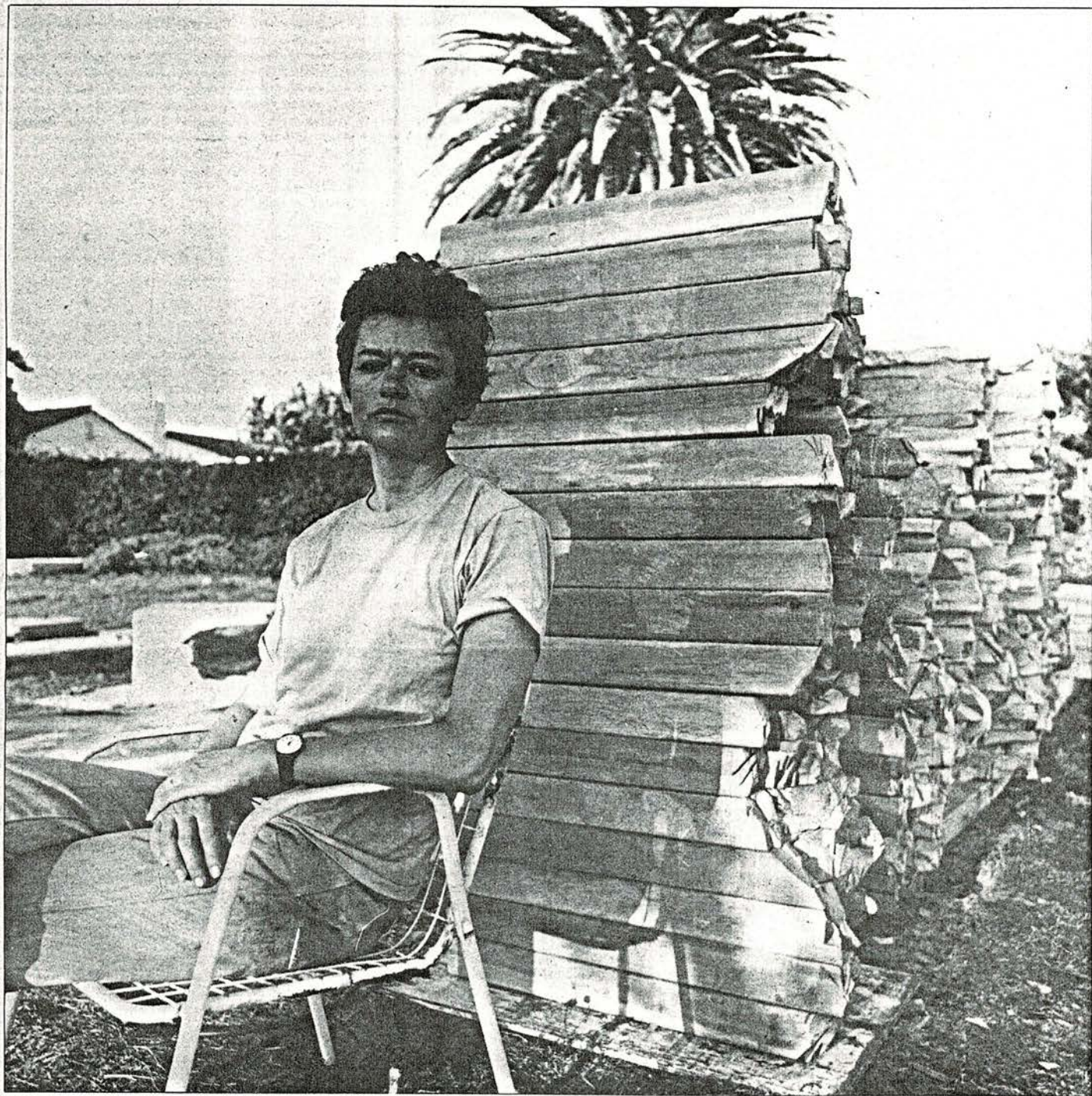
show 'Real Estate.' That's certainly a hot topic in Santa Barbara. But the artists didn't like the idea very much," she said, objecting to its commercial overtones. "Of course, artists from other places don't realize what a big deal real estate is here."

Giving artists carte blanche outside of institutionalized art domains can cause problems, as witness the controversies over public art. Here, the art becomes a mediating force between private and public spaces; the art touches not only on the artist's creative ego but the identity of the hosting homeowner.

In her catalogue essay, art historian Dore Ashton puts the Home Show in historical perspective: "The assignment has its origins in modern art history, which for nearly a century has again and again proposed that there could be (and at times, insisted there should be) a rapprochement between art and life." In his essay, sociologist Howard S. Becker has another take: "The chief way to show that works of art, and especially the works made for Home Show, aren't just decoration is to make it painfully evident that it interferes substantially with the owners' customary use of their home." In most instances, these pieces propose, at worst,

WAYNE MULLER





For her sculpture, Ursula von Rydingsvard (pictured) took over a World War II bunker behind the Florence Mithoefer residence.

gentle interference to every day housekeeping. An example is David Ireland's piece in the Klausner residence; his huge intersecting white planes clogging a staircase are at once subtle and subversive additions to the architecture.

The Home Show's inspiration came when Klausner read a 1986 *New York Times* story describing a similar exhibition in Ghent, Belgium. Excited by the idea of the Belgian show, Klausner set about raising the money needed for such a Herculean effort. The initial proposal was pitched unsuccessfully to the National Endowment for the Arts, which flinched at the project's scope. At the NEA's suggestion, Klausner scaled the show down by

half from its planned 20 art installations and found a benefactor in the Lannan Foundation of La Jolla, a major funder of contemporary art.

**K**lausner and CAF board member Kathryn Clark contacted conceptual artists known for their installations, and the response was enthusiastic. However, they doubted whether it would be as easy to find homeowners eager to be guinea pigs for art's sake. In an act of good faith, Betty Klausner and her husband offered up their own seaside home for the cause. "Bob and I felt we couldn't ask people to participate if we weren't willing," Klausner relates.

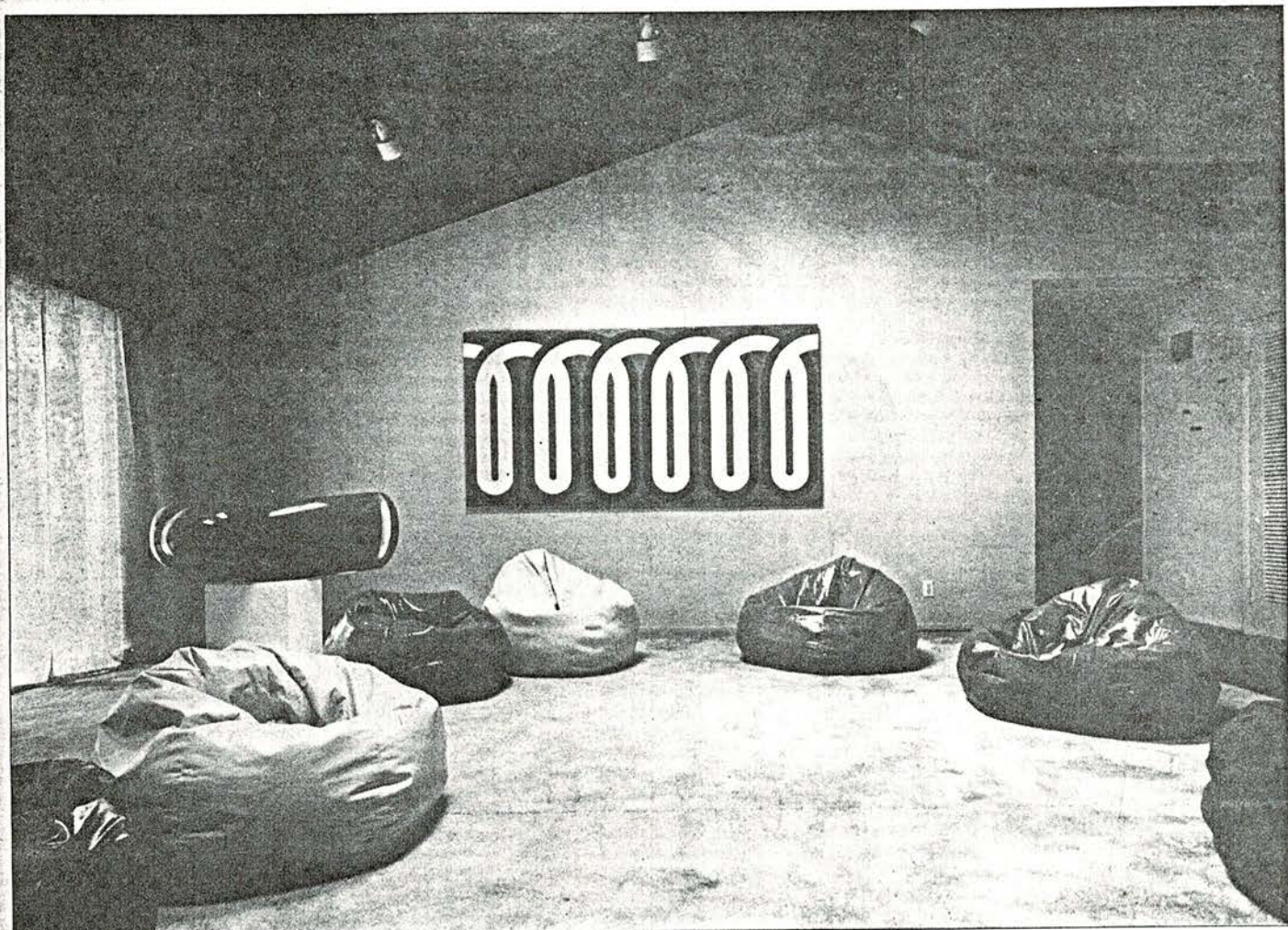
Fortunately, by the time the 10 artists had been chosen, 27 local homes had been put up for their consideration. Klausner and Juliette Betita-Spier navigated the logistics and kept the artists and homeowners satisfied. The result is the most comprehensive CAF project to date, one that has received attention from around the nation, and one that may be imitated. It is an admirable coup that the CAF has achieved here; by infusing art in private spaces, the experience is fundamentally altered and therefore refreshed.

One of the most memorable pieces, however, hardly relates to a living space at all. Ursula von Rydingsvard has taken over a former World War II bunker that serves as

a guest house and occasional bed-and-breakfast space behind the home of Fe Mithoefer. (In an example of the pitfalls in the art/home relationship, the piece had to be temporarily removed this summer when Mithoefer's son came to visit.) On a bluff overlooking the Pacific, the panoramic view is stunning while the sound of crashing waves filters up the cliffs in undulant rhythms. Von Rydingsvard's contemplative sculpture is like an enigmatic shrine of singed and chopped cedar. Seven meticulously constructed pews in the back of the room provide an ocean lookout, the lofty perch of cave-dwelling sages.

Her conception of the piece evolved as she worked away on the





Jim Isemann, in an untitled work, transformed the livingroom of Allan Ghitteman and Susan Rose.

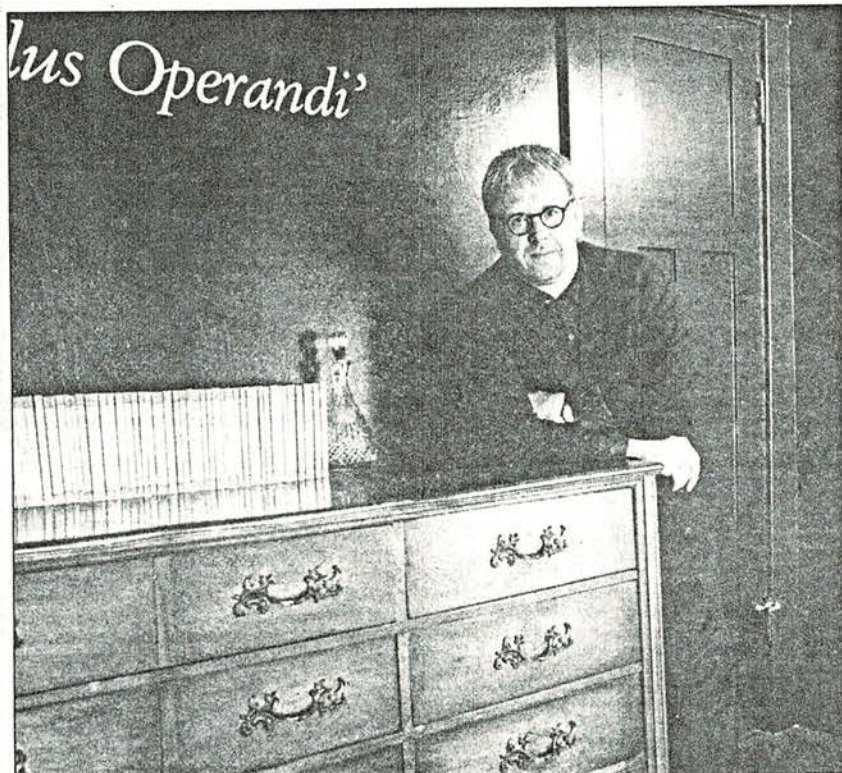
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site. Thus, the pew-like concavities were inspired partly by audible influences. "I went out of my way to make these seven hollows because of the connection I felt to the sound of the waves."

Apart from its more poetic qualities, the piece takes into account the history of the space—a government-issue utilitarian shell used for surveillance of submarine activity—and Von Rydingsvard's own background as a German who spent time in refugee camps after World War II. "I'm very used to raw, directly built barracks," she comments. "Fondness is the wrong word... but there's a feeling that I have towards buildings built that expediently, with only function in mind."

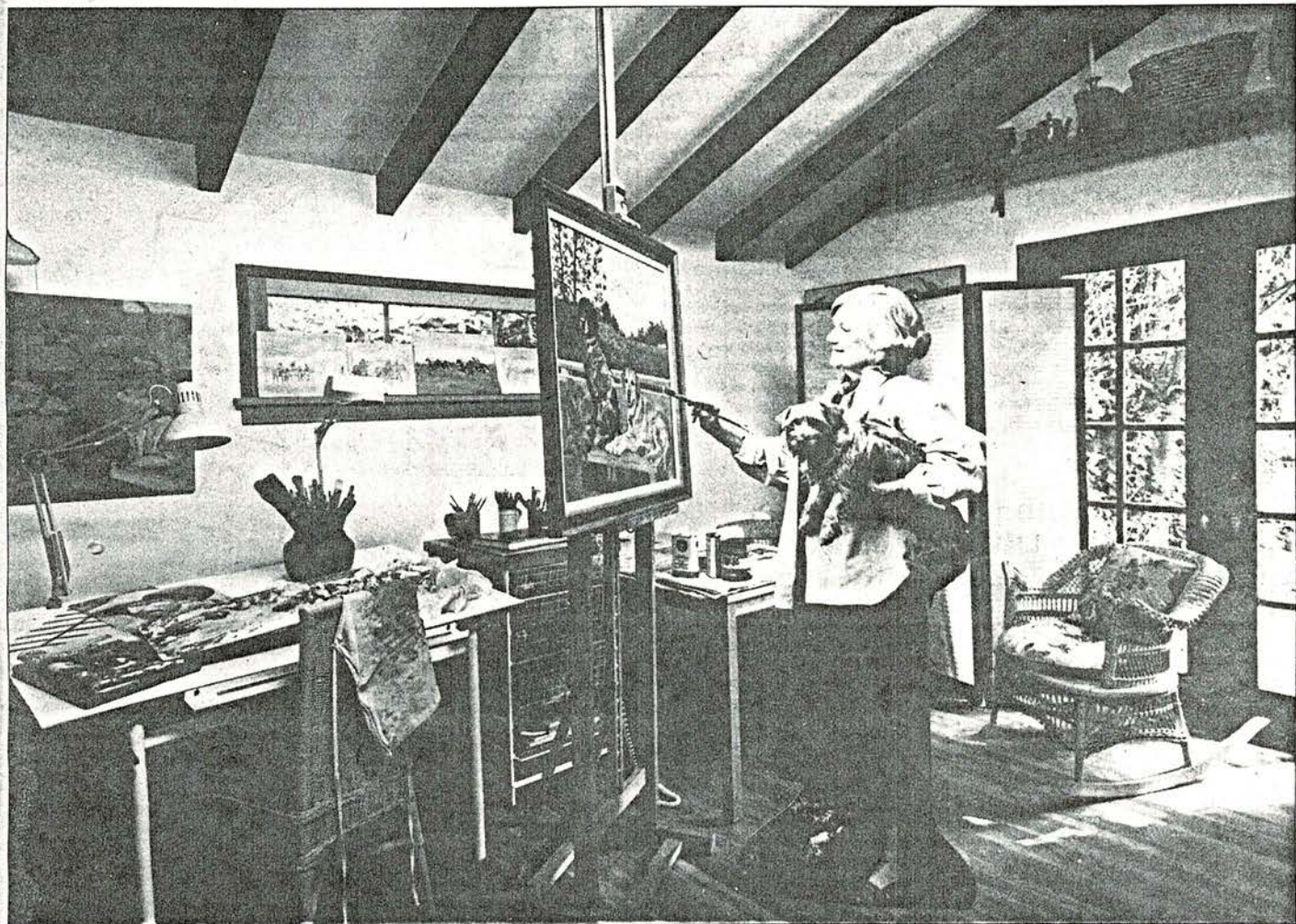
While her piece is the exhibition's most seaside-specific work, the artist said she usually goes out of her way to avoid ocean views. Her initial attraction was more geometric and practical. "It was a cube. I wanted a square, almost a box in which to build this piece. I looked at some of the other houses and I felt that the taste and the fact of living in that space and what happens as a result was already so present. I like warehouse kind of spaces, spaces that are not too refined. One of the homes they thought would be good for me was an English Tudor home about 100 years old. An interior decorator had come and completed it. I can't go into a home and start overthrowing what's been established. I'm not that kind of personality."

Just up the road, Ann Hamilton—the only Santa Barbara artist—has



For "Modus Operandi (Santa Barbara)," Joseph Kosuth (pictured) painted the walls black in the bedroom of psychiatrist Jon Tatomer.





In "Dogtales," Ilene Segalove created a life-sized cardboard cutout of the home's owner, Constance Coleman.

"overthrown" Jill Barnitz's living room in a most evocative way. As an installation artist, Hamilton has specialized in imposing tableau-like constructions and elaborate three-dimensional dreamscapes. She deals in surreal estate, which made her an ideal Home Show candidate. Her piece is among the most striking and inventive uses of domestic space.

Barnitz's room is an open space with a cathedral-like ceiling. Hamilton has waxed the walls and covered them with eucalyptus leaves (like the wall festooned with insects at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art), while an upside-down eucalyptus tree hangs from the ceiling. The centerpiece, though, is a table stacked high with men's dress shirts that have been singed and gilded (a literal pile of domestic work). An eerie human presence contrasts with the inanimate nature of the installation; a sitter in men's formal wear (it was Margaret Tedesco this day) stares impassively at the shirt mound. Overhead, a faint strain of opera music completes the picture of irrational beauty.

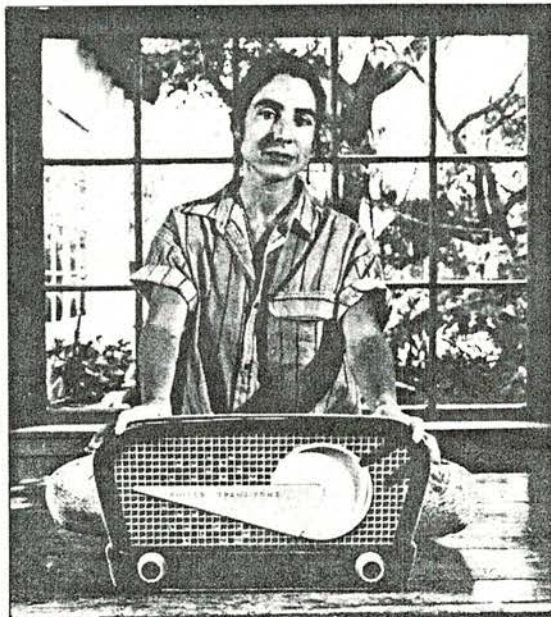
If Hamilton's work literally consumes a room, Norie Sato's video installation only takes up the fireplace in Anna Ray Clark's State Street home. Three television monitors show pretaped footage—of the Clark's home, of Sato's eyes superimposed with flickering flames, and occasional feeds of whatever's on KEYT at the moment. Surrounding the monitors

are sharp shards of glass, leaping outward like flames.

Glass, transparent and perilous, is a critical ingredient for the artist. "Even though it's not hot, it has a feeling of being hot," explains Sato. "It's seductive on one hand, but don't get too close or you'll get injured. Fires are the same way—beautiful to look at, but you don't want to get too close." The definition of a fireplace has been turned into a metaphor, as a place of warmth and danger. Clark is intrigued with the work, laughing, "Quite frankly, my cat used to like to pee in the fireplace. So this trained him."

The Seattle-based Sato has worked outside the gallery setting before, including a video installation in a shopping mall. She had been wanting to do a piece in a fireplace, and the Home Show seemed a perfect opportunity. "This is not a piece I could really do in a gallery, unless it happened to have a fireplace. It was really a response to the specific space. When I saw that house, all these things came together. I've been interested in how the ephemeral video image has a lot to do with the way our brains work. I've been interested in that link. That house is old, and it has a certain sense of history, but you don't know exactly what it is."

She sees the juxtaposition of the taped footage and the instantaneous cable input as an important part of the work process. "[The live television] has the sense of the present.

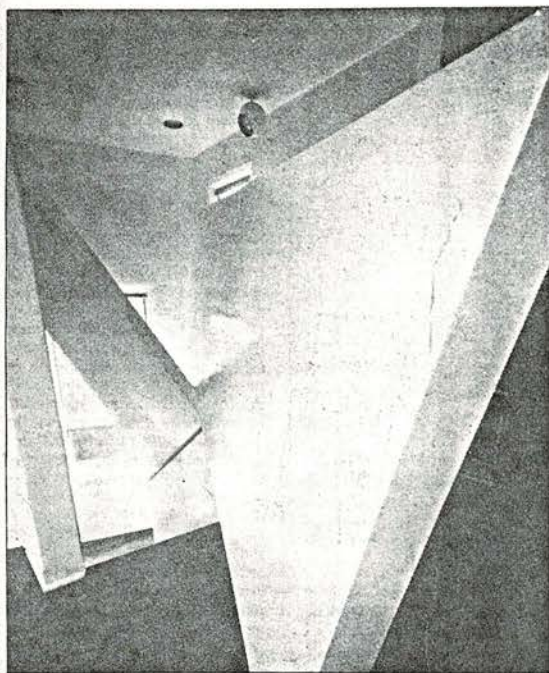


Artist Ilene Segalove.

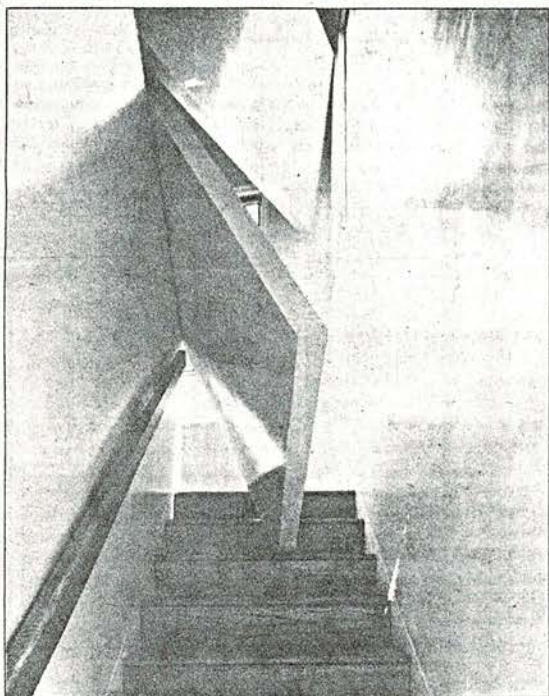
Everything else in that piece has to do with the past and memory. The TV set is like the reality. It's not real at all, but it's coming over the air right there, right then. It contrasts the present with the past." Her multiple monitor imagery also pertains to the confusing nature of

electronic visual media. "To me, there's something about television that has to do with interference. Things happen, you switch channels and never quite know what's going to be there. It's all about chance. I like to incorporate that





WAYNE MCCALL



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David Ireland's untitled piece dominates the stairway at the Betty and Bob Klausner home.

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little bit."

In the case of David and Pat Farmer's home, Kate Ericson and Susan Rose's Hope Ranch ranch suends the very foundation of how a private home works. Privacy—between the inhabitants and the ogling art public—is no longer an option. The huge stack of doors in the living room lie in testament to the act of demystification.

Jim Iserman wryly reinvents the living room of Allan Ghitlerman and Susan Rose's Hope Ranch ranch house with '60s-ish tubular imagery, with the light suffusing through tacky gold drapes into a room full of bean bag chairs.

A whimsical touch of genius informs Ilene Segalove's piece, ideally suited to Pope and Constance Coleman's enchanting little storybook cottage on Garden Street. Aply,

Segalove traffics in stories. In her taped Dog Tales—something similar to William Wegman's canine studies—morbid humor and poignancy creep into the text as we sit around a fake radio in the breakfast nook or listen in Constance's actual painting studio (she paints animals, among other subjects). And there stands Constance the artist, a life-size cardboard cutout with brush to canvas. Erika Rothenberg, whose "Antimedia room" in the home of Jack and Patrice Waidner features a "Celebrity Simulator," which leaves the storytelling to the discretion of the visitor, and leads to a microphone-studded podium and onto a closed circuit TV system. Fifteen minutes of fame is as easy as a walk to the family room. Every home should have one.

Cy Madrone's home, meanwhile,

is anything but average. Nor was the process by which artist Lisa Hein completed her project there. Tucked away on the cul-de-sac of Pico Street, Madrone's home—still unfinished after years of construction—has many facets. Hein was particularly attracted to the home's diagonal and vertical lines. Her relationship with the homeowner—an architect and all-around creative tinkerer—also proved to be diagonal.

"When I first met Lisa, I didn't quite know what to make of her. I was intimidated by her presence as she was by mine," Madrone comments. "She liked what she saw in the space and wanted to do a piece. I was apprehensive because I hadn't seen any of her work, but I was flattered that my house was chosen."

Among the conceptual amendments to Madrone's home is a "split welcome"—a walkway separated by a chain-link fence, which could be a personal metaphor for, as Madrone explains with a grin, "The sense of seeing me as two-sided, obnoxious and charming." The side of the house subjected to art is essentially a study in vertical motion. Streamers of cloth lead up three levels to a heart-shaped structure of chicken wire that has been stuffed with bits of fabric. As Madrone actively observed Hein's progress and pitched in, the piece became a collaboration.

"It was ambitious on her part," Madrone says, "and I just jumped into the fray. I shoot from the hip, that's one thing she said she likes about me. Whereas she tends to plod along and think things out, I just react. I said, 'No, Lisa, this isn't right. We want the structure expressed. If we hang the fabric on the outside, we're going to obscure the chicken wire.'" He wound up scavenging bales of salvaged clothes and he ended up stuffing the heart. "She had done the masculine stuff—the heavy metal stuff—and I did the soft stuff. Having worked as a stage set designer, she's worked with Skillsaws and framing. We complemented each other in terms of tools and ideas and skills."

Madrone is a happy Home Show homeowner. "This has been a real special experience for me. It massages my exhibitionist tendencies."

**A** different sort of collaboration was involved in the piece done by Joseph Kosuth in psychiatrist Jon Tatomer's Arrellaga home. Kosuth painted the walls of Tatomer's bedroom black and imprinted them with the words 'Modus Operandi.' In his work, Kosuth has a special penchant for psychiatry and his Tatomer project fulfilled an idea begun in Belgium two years ago. (Kosuth was the only one of the artists here who had been involved in the original show in Belgium.) In a Belgian psychiatrist's home, Kosuth dealt with the entire house but for his bedroom. Tatomer's room completes the picture.

This is not to suggest that Tatomer is an especially dark person or a dabbler in the occult. Black walls serve, rather, as a kind of neutralizer with open-ended interpretations. In a psychiatrist's bedroom, the occupant and the bed itself are means toward unconscious realizations—dreams and psychological breakthroughs. Kosuth requested a psychiatrist's home to work in and then was doubly intrigued to find that Tatomer has his own special eccentric mania as a collector who boasts 5,000 records, a huge set of Penguin paperbacks, banana peel stickers, and baseball cards (on the day we

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Ursula von Rydingsvard working at the Waldner residence.

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dropped by, he was off to a baseball card convention). He also loves wine, a leaning represented by the decanters placed as bookends to support Penguin volumes.

Tatomer was a game victim, even when suspecting the artist's true motives. "The artist has a strong connection—I'm not sure what the connection is—to Freud. I think it might even be whimsical. He collects Freud first editions. He didn't even care if I was Freudian. I'm not strongly Freudian. I'm not anti-Freudian. I'm a psychiatrist who uses what works." If there's a piece in the Home Show, subject to

emperor's-new-clothes reactions from the public, it is Kosuth's. Tatomer realizes that, beneath his intellectual investigations, Kosuth is tinged with a prankster's sense of irony. "He's a tongue-in-cheek man. He uses subtle or not so subtle jokes, as if to say, let's stir some feelings rather than make something that's new or beautiful. He wants people to see things in new ways."

The art work is based on such a simple gesture that it demands that the viewer think about what it may or may not mean. "Sometimes the simplest things can have the most powerful impact," the homeowner

ventures. As for Tatomer, who continues to live in the room and is considering leaving the color after the show's run finishes, he's grown accustomed to its face. "The color of the wall—if it had been painted red or some ugly green—would have made it hard to live with. But the wall is always reflected with white, so it's not really black. It reminds me of taverns I've seen in Williamsburg, with dark walls and brick. I told people, I don't know what's happening, but I think it's a little bit like having my punk grandmother come over. It's something a little weird.

"This work of art cost me no-

thing. It was a big risk. It could have been something that I would have despised. I said, 'I don't care what you do.' Later, I told him, 'Look, you could have blown holes in the ceiling and hung dead animals from the rafters. Whatever you needed to do, I would have gone along with it.'"

Did he have any reservations or stipulations going into the project?

"Yeah," he deadpans, "I said you can do anything you want except paint it black."

On the downside, one could accuse the Home Show, in its finished form, of potential elitism. None of the homes finally chosen dip below

the middle to upper-middle class strata, although among the available sites was a homeless shelter. It's a shame, really, that no artist picked that particular dwelling, symbolic as it is of another local and compelling problem known to the world—indeed, we're seemingly notorious for our soap opera and our callousness toward the homeless.

Short of representing the lower end of the housing spectrum, it would have been democratic—not to mention quite interesting—to penetrate Goleta's suburban sprawl or the east side's modest homes. Out-of-towners tuning into the Home Show won't get much clearer a view of Santa Barbara by visiting Montecito, Hope Ranch, the Riviera, or more distinctive downtown houses than would the average couch potato in Des Moines who believes that the TV show *Santa Barbara* has anything to do with the city. Could it be that artists, in general, aspire towards an elite layer of art aficionados that comprises their support system? Utopian ideals aside, it's not the working class that keeps contemporary art alive, but an upper crust of culturally interested parties who can afford to buy and think about art. It's a cynical appraisal, perhaps, but one that isn't discouraged by this show.

Nevertheless, quarantining art in the established halls of art institutions has long been a bone of contention in modern art, from Duchamp to Kurt Schwitters to Christo and beyond. To have art intrude on the realm of private homes is a concept that seems so historically inevitable that it's surprising it took so long to happen.

The CAF may well have on its hands a bit of history in the making.