

Vol. 2, No. 2

March 1979

PROFILE: washington project for the arts

Performances, films, video, gallery shows, artists' bookshop, workshops and symposia, publications, outdoor public art works, as well as visits to artists' studios—this is what the Washington Project for the Arts does, and much much more. The WPA is one of the many organizations established in major cities across the U.S. devoted to the solution of special problems posed by various new artforms of the seventies.

Founded in 1975 by Alice Denney as a resource and performing arts center serving the greater metropolitan area of Washington, D.C., it is housed in an 18,000 square foot, three-story building, donated by the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development. Alice Denney envisioned the WPA as a center that would provide services and space to painters, filmmakers, dancers, video artists, musicians, sound artists, actors, photographers, sculptors and writers, as well as performance artists, environmental artists, and art publishers.

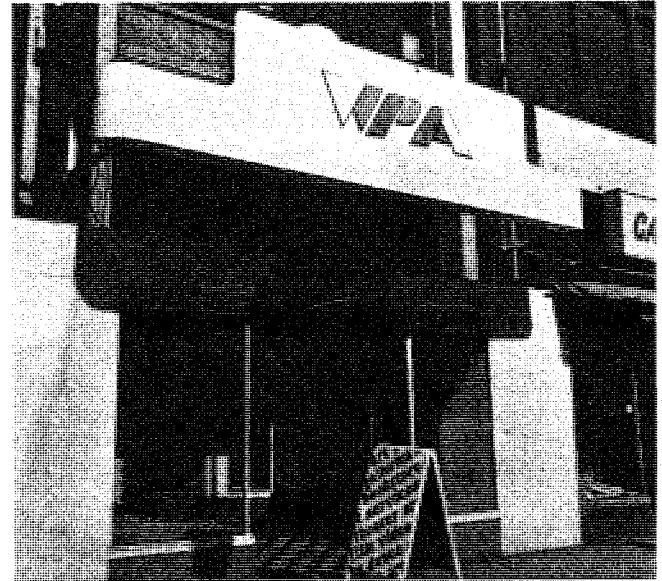
Serving as the principal art service organization in the District of Columbia, focussing on professional, non-traditional, and non-commercial approaches to contemporary art as well as purely experimental art forms, the WPA is dedicated to serve and educate the Washington art community as a local as well as a national showcase, serving as a bridge to bring art from all regions of the country as well as worldwide to the District of Columbia.

Located at 1227 G Street, N.W., the building has a total of four rooms of gallery space, two theater spaces, a screening room, a lounge, administrative offices, and an artists' bookstore. This allows for a wide range of activities, immediately accessible to residents in all areas of Washington, being conveniently located across from the Metro Center subway station. Due to redevelopment, the Department of Housing and Community Development has guaranteed accomodation in new sites, and currently the W.P.A. is negotiating a new site for its galleries.

OUT OF DOORS

WPA has recently been awarded an empty lot in the center of the city on a temporary basis for a public art program in which Alice Aycock, Bob Wade and Rockne Krebs will be exhibiting large public pieces for the delectation of the D.C. downtown community. These monumental, environmental, site-oriented public art works will be on exhibition for two months each. A series of outdoor performances by a national selection of performance and body artists, including dancers and mimes, will also complement this project.

Open City, an invitation to the public to visit artists' studios on the weekend of January 26 - 28 and the weekend



of February 2 - 4, proved to be quite successful. A map was provided to all those who wished to partake of this two-weekend opportunity to visit actual contemporary artists' studios, and it was a great success

BOOKSHOP

The Artists' Book Shop has been open since 14 July 1978 and has provided the metropolitan DC community with a unique opportunity to buy publications not carried anywhere else, self-published works by artists, as well as periodicals and small presses, which include poetry and literature. The shop has done well, thanks to Al Nodal, Assistant Director, who has put much energy into attracting a large array of current artists' bookworks. A poetry series is also in the near future, which will provide the community with poetry readings on a regular basis.

PERFORMANCE

A very intense program of performances in dance, theater, poetry readings, and intermedia seem to occur twice a week at WPA. The talent comes not only from Washington but from all parts of the U.S. It is an exciting program that supplements the legitimate theatre renaissance in the District. It also brings otherwise inaccessible talent to the metropolitan area for the enjoyment of all. The theatre areas are spacious and lend themselves to the most professional presentations. The space is the envy of many alternative spaces throughout the U.S.

Under the leadership of Denney and Nodal, the programs developed have extended far beyond expectations. Pamela Zulli Ziegenfuss is the Performance Coordinator and handles the local and international talent that is presented at the WPA.

VIDEO

The WPA's video program is at the heart of the international video scene, with continuous viewings. People can come in from the street and view current and contemporary video programs on an ongoing basis.

Denny and Nodal want to stay downtown, to develop and contain the energy that they find in the downtown area. Now that D.C. Space has opened (a restaurant and a small performance space), there seems to be a renaissance and commitment in the art scene downtown. Across the street, the Museum of Temporary Art also has an intense program, so that art seems to be thriving downtown and the WPA signals the energy and activity that is increasing each day.

With the variety of programming and the wide-ranging talent of the community art scene, the WPA is trying to tell the world that there is more in Washington, DC than the National Gallery and the Smithsonian Institution. The WPA has shown the way, and the hope is for a still more intense and energetic program for the years to come.



MEMBER OF ASSOCIATED ART PUBLISHERS NETWORK

UMBRELLA is a bimonthly newsletter of art news, reviews and art information of current trends. UMBRELLA is published by Umbrella Associates, P.O. Box 3692, Glendale, CA 91201 and issued in January, March, May, July, September and November. \$12.50 a year, individuals, U.S. and Canada; \$16.50 for institutions, U.S. and Canada; Foreign: \$14.50 surface, \$17.50 airmail; Foreign Institutions: \$18.50 surface, \$21.50 airmail.

Copyright © 1979 by Umbrella Associates

JUDITH A. HOFFBERG, Editor
AMY NAVRATIL, Book Review Editor
KEN FRIEDMAN, Contributing Editor
JUDITH AMINOFF, Contributing Editor
MICHELE FIELD, Contributing Editor
LIZ LYDIATE, Contributing Editor
A.L. STUBBS, New York Correspondent

Typesetting: JUDITH A. HOFFBERG
Printing: GLENDALE INSTANT PRINTING

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

EDITORIAL: Performance Art: A Critic's Dilemma

Recently, we were reading in the *New York Times* about a new collaboration between dance experimentalist Lucinda Childs, Phil Glass, the musician and composer, and Sol LeWitt, the visual artist. This is not the first time such a collaboration has taken place, nor in fact is it the last. For we see that several critics are now confronted with interesting questions of "Who should review it? Drama critics? Art critics? Dance critics?" Perhaps we should all turn to the 1960s and the Fluxus movement for the answers.

As Dick Higgins so aptly named this phenomenon way back in the 1960s, "intermedia" have provided the changing avant-garde with a problem for criticism. Recently, avant-garde dancers have been more welcome among visual artists than in the dance world. This new close relationship between the avant-garde dance and visual artists stems from the previous decade and is not new at all. In fact, the Judson Dance Theater rose from the strong alliance with music and the visual arts, to make the post-modern dance scene a true intermedia experience. The transposition of ideas that were applied to music and the visual arts into dance weighed heavily in the 1960s. In fact, the newest avant-garde phenomenon in which dancers participate is now an interdisciplinary approach to new forms of dramatic tableau and is called "performance art."

Who, then, do we have to truly serve as critics of this art form? Who, in fact, is trained to abide by "criteria" whereby one can say a performance is "good" or "bad."

Not only has dance moved in this direction, but "spectacles" of another sort include music, art, dance, and new dimensions even less recognized. If this new work continues to find adherents throughout the country and artists whose work is chiefly in the field of performance want to be reviewed, then we feel that a less specialized kind of criticism is in demand right now, and in fact, a less parochial set of artistic values whereby to judge such performance art.

We would appreciate comments from our readers.

With this issue, we welcome on board our Australia editor, Michele Field, from the University of Queensland, and our London Editor, Liz Lydiate. In addition, we will be having news about critics and artists in New York City from A. L. Stubbs. We hope this more comprehensive coverage will be of interest to our readers and we request comments from you about anything we are reporting. Let us know what you would like to have in this Newsletter; tell us what we can do better; and let us know what you would like us to avoid. Thank you from all our old subscribers, and welcome to our new ones. We need more so let your friends know about *Umbrella*.

—jah

I WAS ALWAYS GLAD TO SUPPLY ANY INFORMATION
I COULD TO ANYONE WHO ASKED ME POLITELY.

—Marcel Duchamp