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	MoMA PS1	I. A. 293

PAULA COOPER

0012 677-4390

Born: Long Be
 Education: Mills C
 Yale Sc
 Yale Sc
 Awards: Fellow
 Harris
 Instructor, School

**JENNIFER
 BARTLETT**

, 1974

Individual Exhibitions

- 1963 Mills College
- 1970 119 Spring St
- 1972 Reese Palley
- 1973 Jacob's Ladder
- 1974 Paula Cooper
Saman Gallery
- 1975 Garage, London
John Doyle Ga
- 1976 Paula Cooper
Dartmouth Col
Contemporary
- 1977 Wadsworth Ath
Paula Cooper
- 1978 Saman Gallery
University of
San Francisco
Hansen-Fuller
Art Museum of
Baltimore Art
- 1979 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles,

SWIMMERS ATLANTA

Commissioned by the Art in Architecture program
 of the United States General Services Administration
 for the lobby of the new Richard B. Russell Federal Building
 and U.S. Courthouse, Atlanta, Georgia.

September 19 - October 13, 1979
 Opening Reception, September 19, 6 to 8 pm

The Institute for Art and Urban Resources
 The Clocktower
 13th Floor, 108 Leonard Street, New York, N.Y. 10013

Group Exhibition:

- 1971 "Seven Walls", The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1972 "Painting Annual", The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- "Annual Invitational: Focus on Women", Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
- "Painting & Sculpture Today", Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana
- "Art Without Limits", Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York
- "Painting: New Options", The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
- "American Women Artists", GEDOK, Kunsthaus, Hamburg, Germany
- "Small Series", Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- 1973 "Art in Evolution", Xerox Exhibition Center, Rochester, New York
- Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- "Contemporary American Drawings", The Whitney Museum, New York
- "C.7500", California Institute of Art, Valencia, California
 (traveling exhibition organized by Lucy Lippard)
- "Works on Paper", Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia
- "Conceptual Art", Women's Interart Center, New York
- "Drawings and Other Work", Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

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PAULA C

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 This event is made possible with funds from
 the New York State Council on the Arts.
 Gallery Hours: Wed through Sat, 1 to 6 pm

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PAID

NEW YORK, N.Y.
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Born:

Education:

Awards:

Instructor

Individual

- 1963 Mill
- 1970 119
- 1972 Rees
- 1973 Jacc
- 1974 Paul
- Sama
- 1975 Gar
- John
- 1976 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire
- Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati
- 1977 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford
- Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- 1978 Saman Gallery, Genoa, Italy
- University of California, Irvine
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California
- Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
- Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi
- Baltimore Art Museum, Maryland
- 1979 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles,

Group Exhibition:

- 1371 "Seven Walls", The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1972 "Painting Annual", The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- "Annual Invitational: Focus on Women", Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
- "Painting & Sculpture Today", Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana
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PAULA COOPER 155 WOOSTER ST. NEW YORK 10012 677-4390

JENNIFER BARTLETT

Born: Long Beach, California, 1941
 Education: Mills College, Oakland, California, B.A., 1963
 Yale School of Art and Architecture, B.F.A., 1964
 Yale School of Art and Architecture, M.F.A., 1965
 Awards: Fellowship, CAPS (Creative Artists Public Service), 1974
 Harris Prize, Art Institute of Chicago, 1976
 Instructor, School of Visual Arts, New York City

Individual Exhibitions

1963 Mills College, Oakland, California
 1970 119 Spring Street, New York
 1972 Reese Palley Gallery, New York
 1973 Jacob's Ladder, Washington, D.C. (with Jack Tworikov)
 1974 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 Saman Gallery, Genoa, Italy
 1975 Garage, London, England (with Joel Shapiro)
 John Doyle Gallery, Chicago
 1976 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire
 Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati
 1977 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford
 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 1978 Saman Gallery, Genoa, Italy
 University of California, Irvine
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California
 Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
 Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi
 Baltimore Art Museum, Maryland
 1979 Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles,

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PAULA COOPER 155 WOOSTER ST. NEW YORK 10012 677-4390

Jennifer Bartlett

- 1974 Spring Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 Fall Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 "Works on Paper", Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond
 Opening Group Exhibition, Doyle-Pigman Gallery, Paris
 "Drawings and Other Work", Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- 1975 "37th Corcoran Biennial", Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington
 "Small Scale in Contemporary Art", Society for Contemporary Art,
 34th Exhibition, Teh Art Institute of Chicago
 9e Biennale de Paris
 "Recent Work", Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont
 "Approaching Painting: Part One", Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York
- 1976 Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 "Scale", Fine Arts Building, New York
 "72nd Annual Exhibition", Art Institute of Chicago
 "The Liberation: Fourteen American Artists", Aarhus Museum
 of Art, Denmark (and traveling to European museums)
 Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, Los Angeles
 "Contemporary Approaches to Painting", The University Art Galleries,
 University of California, Sanata Barbara
 "Soho", Akademie der Kunste, West Berlin
 "New Work/New York", California State University, Los Angeles
 Group Exhibition, organized by Paula Cooper, Galerie Mukai, Tokyo
 "Soho", Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark
 "Yale Art Students' Choice 1976-77", Yale University School of Art
 Gallery, New Haven
 "The Pure Form", Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf, West Germany
- 1977 Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 "Aspects of Constructivist Art", Kunsthau, Zurich (Selections from
 the McCrory Corporation Collection)
 "Private Images: Photographs by Painters", Los Angeles County Museum
 of Art, Los Angeles
 "Maps", Penthouse, The Museum of Modern Art, New York
 "1977 Biennial Exhibition", The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
 "Painting 75,76,77", Sarah Lawrence College; The American Foundation
 for the Arts, Miami; The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati
 "For The Mind and The Eye", New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
 Documenta 6, Kassel, West Germany
 Group Show, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 "Historical Aspects of Constructivism and Concrete Art", Musee d'Art
 Moderne de la Ville de Paris
 "20th Century American Art from Friends' Collections", Whitney
 Museum of American Art, New York
 "New York: The State of Art", New York State Museum, Albany
 "Critics' Choice", Lowe Art Gallery, Syracuse University, Syracuse,
 and Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York
 "Master Drawings and Prints", The New Gallery, Cleveland
- 1978 Group Show, Y.M.H.A., Philadelphia
 Group Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
 "Art for the New Year", Penthouse, Museum of Modern Art, New York
 "New York, 1977", Amherst College, Massachusetts
 "Art for Corporations", Penthouse, Museum of Modern Art, New York

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PAULA COOPER 155 WOOSTER ST. NEW YORK 10012 677-4390

Jennifer Bartlett

Group Exhibitions:

- 1978 "Tenth Anniversary Group Exhibition", Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York
"Prints in Cincinnati Collections", Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati
"New Image Painting", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Point", Philadelphia College of Art, Pennsylvania
"Selected Prints II, 1960-1978", Brooke Alexandre Gallery,
New York
- 1979 "Whitney Biennial", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Two Decades of Abstraction", Tampa Bay Art Center, Florida
""Drawings about Drawing" New Directions in the Medium(1968-
1978)", William Hayes Ackland Memorial Art Center,
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
"Small is Beautiful", Freedman Art Gallery, Albright College,
Reading, Pennsylvania
"New York Now", Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona
"Decade in Review", The Whitney Museum, New York

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THE INSTITUTE FOR **ART AND URBAN RESOURCES**, INC. EXECUTIVE OFFICE: THE CLOCKTOWER, 108 LEONARD ST., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013
AREA CODE 212/233-1096 BRENDAN GILL, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ALANNA HEISS, PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PROJECTS: WORKSPACE / PROJECT STUDIOS ONE (P.S. 1) / THE CLOCKTOWER / NEW URBAN LANDSCAPES / SURPLUS MATERIALS

JENNIFER BARTLETT
"SWIMMERS FOR ATLANTA"
SEPT. 19--OCT. 13, 1979
OPENING: SEPT. 19
6--8 P.M.

PRESS RELEASE:

THE CLOCKTOWER
108 LEONARD ST.
N.Y., N.Y.
AUG. 15, 1979

Jennifer Bartlett will open the season at the Clocktower on September 19, 1979 with a major series of paintings titled "Swimmers For Atlanta." These works were commissioned by the Art in Architecture Program of the United States General Services Administration for the Lobby of the Richard B. Russell Federal Building in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Clocktower exhibition will include Photo documentation of the Atlanta site, work drawings and presentation drawings. In addition the nine paintings which comprise this work will also be exhibited before their official installation at Atlanta later this year. The paintings, varying in size from 2' x 2' to 18' x 18', each consist of two parts: A multiple steel plate work painted with Testor enamel and the other part oil on canvas.

The opening will be Sept. 19, 1979 from 6 to 8 P.M. and continue through October 13.

The Clocktower Hours are Wed.--Sat. from 1-6 P.M. For further information please call 212-784-2084.

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The Clocktower
108 Leonard St.
- Press Release
DRAFT

Jennifer Bartlett
"Swimmers for Atlanta"
Sept. 19 - Oct. 13
Opening Sept. 19 - 6-8

JENNIFER BARTLETT WILL OPEN THE SEASON AT THE CLOCKTOWER SEPTEMBER 19 WITH A MAJOR SERIES OF PAINTINGS TITLED "SWIMMERS FOR ATLANTA." THESE WORKS WERE COMMISSIONED BY THE ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM OF THE UNITED STATES GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION FOR THE LOBBY OF THE RICHARD B. RUSSELL FEDERAL BUILDING IN ATLANTA.

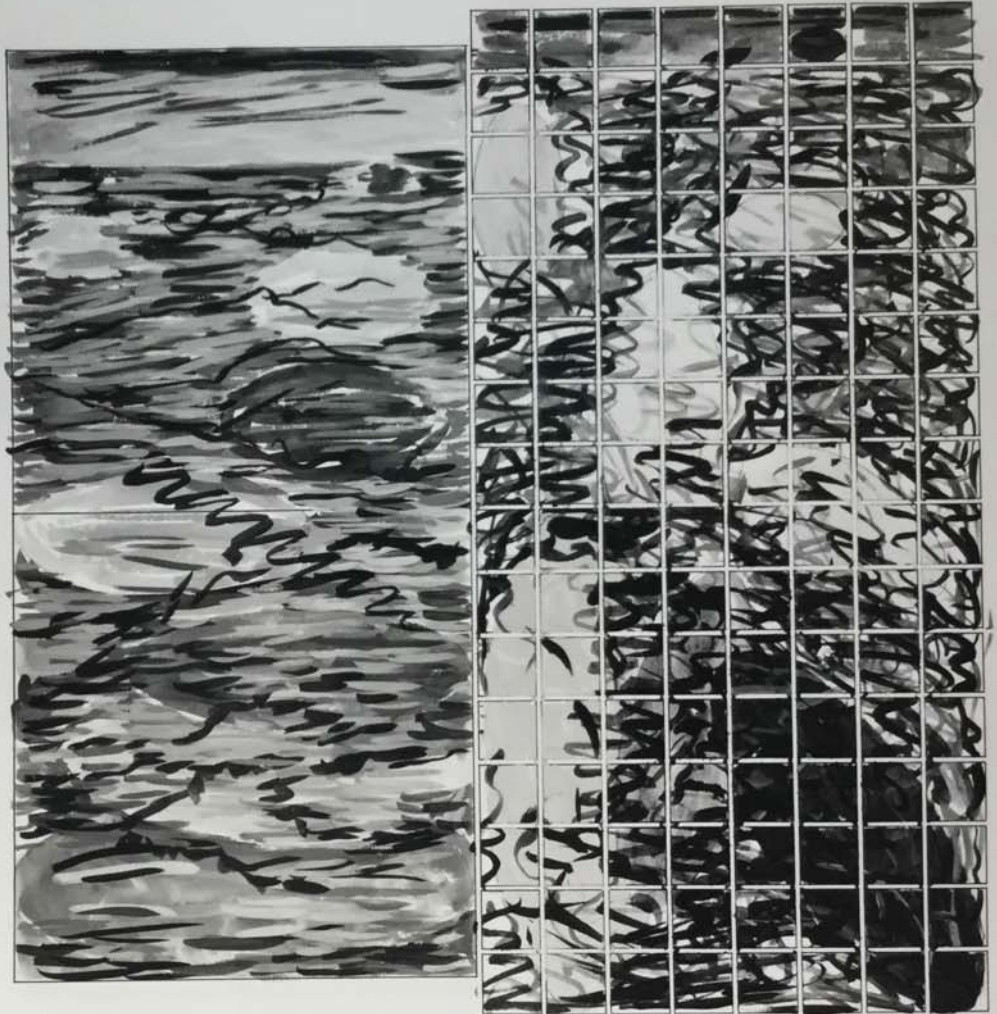
THE CLOCKTOWER EXHIBITION WILL INCLUDE PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF THE ATLANTA SITE, WORK DRAWINGS AND PRESENTATION DRAWINGS. IN ADDITION THE NINE PAINTINGS WHICH COMPRISE THIS WORK WILL ALSO BE EXHIBITED BEFORE THEIR OFFICIAL INSTALLATION AT ATLANTA LATER THIS YEAR. THE PAINTINGS VARYING IN SIZE FROM 2' X 2' TO 18' X 18' ^{each} CONSIST OF TWO PARTS: A MULTIPLE STEEL PLATE WORK PAINTED WITH TESTOR ENAMEL AND THE OTHER ^{Part} ~~HALF~~ OIL ON CANVAS.

THE OPENING WILL BE SEPT. 19 FROM 6 TO 8 pm AND CONTINUE THROUGH OCTOBER 13.

THE CLOCKTOWER HOURS ARE WED-SAT. FROM 1-6. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CALL 212-784-2084.

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COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY
155 WOOSTER, NEW YORK 10012
677-4390 — PLEASE RETURN PHOTO

JENNIFER BARTLETT

Study for Painting #8 1978-79
Seaweed/Swimmers Atlanta
Painting size 16' x 16'
Study: gouache, Testor enamels,
ink on paper
21" x 21"

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478 west broadway
new york, n.y. 10012
(212) 854-1373
neg. no. 797759
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seva-inkeri

COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY
155 WOOSTER, NEW YORK 10012
677-4390 — PLEASE RETURN PHOTO

JENNIFER BARTLETT

Study for Painting #6 1978-79
Flare/Swimmers Atlanta
Painting size 12' x 12'
Study: gouache, Testor enamels,
ink on paper
21" x 21"

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i. no. 791759
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COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY
155 WOOSTER, NEW YORK 10012
677-4390 — PLEASE RETURN PHOTO

JENNIFER BARTLETT

Study for Painting #6 1978-79
Flare/Swimmers Atlanta
Painting size 12' x 12'
Study: gouache, Testor enamels,
ink on paper
21" x 21"

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868-1909-10
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La Toja

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1979

Art People | John Russell



The New York Times/Paul Hosefros

Two Inca Indians from Ecuador are repainting the series of women's heads by Alex Katz at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 42d Street.

ONE of the pleasanter new sights around Manhattan the last year or two has been the series of 23 heads of women by Alex Katz that was put up in 1977 on the northwest corner of Seventh Avenue and 42d Street. They were wrapped around two sides of the building at fourth-floor level, and they also went

Miss Bartlett said in her New York studio the other day. "I worked 12 or 14 hours a day for 10 months. When I first saw art, I thought it was something that you did when you got old. But then when I got Federal money for Atlanta, it made me feel that I had the authority to do something, even though the whole question of public painting is very problematical. Maybe it was easier in an-

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1979

on the corner. They had the look of tranquil expectancy that is one of Mr Katz's specialities, and in 1977 they also looked clean, fresh and trim, the way his people usually do.

Everyone enjoyed them, not least the painter himself. "Seeing them go up was one of the biggest trips I ever had," he said a day or two ago. "It was a fantasy come true. It was just sensational! I couldn't tell how long the heads would last. A painting that's properly made on a stable wall will last for 25 years. Our problem in Times Square was that the heads are painted on metal. Metal expands and contracts with the seasons. It goes one way, and the paint goes another. In a hard winter, like the ones we have in New York, the paint goes fast. And after three or four years, it fades."

And, sure enough, the heads didn't look too great a month or two ago. The paint was flaking off like old nail varnish, and the color had none of its pristine sharpness. It was at that melancholy moment that chivalry triumphed, and the 23 women's heads were rescued from terminal dilapidation by Bingo Brandt, owner of Brandt's 42d Street Theater, and by RKO, whose subsidiary WOR-TV is housed in the building in question. They put up the money, repainting began forthwith, and the work should be finished any day now.

"I was up in Maine," said Mr. Katz, "when I was asked to sign a paper waiving the right to oversee the work. I didn't feel like doing that, so I came back to the city, only to be told that it didn't matter because they'd begun the work anyway. So I got some of the original sketches, and I went down to the site. And I found that the two men who are repainting the heads are Inca Indians from Ecuador. They're really very good. Their style is a little more pizza house than it was the first time round, but I prefer pizza house to strip cartoon."

"The trouble with outdoor projects is that when people pay out money for art they expect it to last forever. Also they get scared if it's not all done by the artist's own hand. But we have great billboard painters in this country, and they know how to work from sketches. We could have great outdoor paintings if people wanted them enough."

People may be shy of outdoor commissions for painting, but indoors it's quite another matter. Everyone agreed, for instance, that some large-scale paintings would improve the new Richard B. Russell Federal Building in Atlanta, which is the largest courthouse in the Southeast. The choice fell on Jennifer Bartlett, a young painter who is known to be able to fill a big space. (Her name was made in 1976 with a painting called "Rhapsody," which measures 987 square feet.)

The paintings — nine in all, totaling 1,100 square feet — were finished two days ago. "It was a big experience,"

cient Egypt, where it was done by decree.

"Anyway, I figured that this was a courthouse. A place where you either get smashed or you survive, right? A place of extremes. I also figured that a hall of justice should be logical, even if logic isn't always consistent. I had a space 200 feet long, 22 feet wide and 20 feet high. I settled on nine separate paintings of varying sizes" — the biggest is 18 feet square — "with a logical color sequence and an equal dosage of sadness and happiness within each image."

In that general plan there is some careful thematic plotting. Schematic swimmers cope as best they can with nine hazards of the open sea: a whirlpool, an iceberg, an eel, a bottle, a buoy, a flare, a rock, a boat and a thicket of seaweed. They also deal with nine specific kinds of weather, from the halcyon days that turn up in poetry to rain, snow, hail, fog and storm. The time of day varies, too, in the same systematic way. It's an anthology of human predicaments, some of them happily resolved and some of them not.

"I'm very much concerned," said Miss Bartlett, "that people in Atlanta should have an opinion as to whether they like it or not. I'd like to catch them and surprise them so that they take it seriously. Art and literature and philosophy should be positive things to be involved with, and not things that get loaded on people who don't want them. Art is always imperfect, but when you're making it, you go with it every inch that you can. Art should be very pure, but when it can be generous, too, as it was with the Impressionists, then it's terrific."

"That's the difference for me between painting and something like weaving. I know that what I'm doing is different from what a weaver does. I'd like my paintings to make people get interested in their lives, and live with some kind of decency and honor and consideration, and want to do something terribly hard."

It is a mistake, by the way, to think that painters get rich from commissions of this sort. The fee sounds nice, but all the expenses — installation included — come out of it. "I have air fares to and from Atlanta, hotels when we get there, trucking at \$43 an hour, tubes of paint at \$6 a time, photography, accountancy, a draftsman to get the walls exactly right, studio space, rent, a bookkeeper, at least one assistant, lighting, walls specially built, insurance . . . We have to drill 1,000 holes in granite before we can even begin the installation. My bill for salaries ran at \$500 a week. It's not uncommon for artists actually to lose money on big public commissions, but in this case I hope to come out earning a little less than a window washer on the subway."

Before going to Atlanta, the paintings will be shown (though not in their destined order) downtown at the Clocktower, 108 Leonard Street, from Sept. 20 to Oct. 13.

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
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Bartlett's Swimmers

Jennifer Bartlett's new series of nine paintings, a government commission bound for Atlanta, was recently exhibited in New York; its subjects include the adventures of ocean-going ellipses, the colors of the spectrum, the variousness of brushwork and an artist moving deeper and deeper into painting.

BY ROBERTA SMITH

With "Swimmers Atlanta," a nine-painting series commissioned by the GSA for the lobby of a federal court building in Georgia's star city, Jennifer Bartlett takes the plunge into painting as she never has before. These works, along with the architectural plans and photographs of their ultimate destination and two sets of studies, were shown this fall at New York's Clocktower before heading south. The paintings—complicated, diverse, colorful and energetically painted—clearly were conceived with the general public in mind. They present a changing progression in terms of size, scale, color and subject and promise to give people plenty to look at and think about. They also look like an interesting solution to a problematical site. But more significant, they represent a crucial point in Bartlett's development. Their real subject is the story of an artist expanding her ability to paint.

In broad terms, Bartlett's career has an orthodox '70s shape to it. Like many members of her generation—most of whom are now hitting 40—she started out at the Conceptual/Minimalist end of the stylistic spectrum and has moved toward an increasingly complex and referential visuality ever since. She has always been credited with something of a smart-aleck, bad-girl position. First, Bartlett systemized her painting quite literally from the ground up: the use of materials and a method of her own invention—thin, bright enamel colors on 1-foot-square steel plates in regular grids on the wall—gave her work a slick fill-in-the-squares look, and a procedural framework which was a thema to many painters. And in the beginning, the line, counting and color

systems which she dotted onto these plates could seem "dumb" and arbitrary to artists with a more abstruse conceptual bent.

With *Rhapsody*, her 987-plate extravaganza of 1975-76 [see *A.I.A.*, Sept.-Oct. '76], things became unhinged in Bartlett's work: abstraction and representation and various styles and painting techniques were intermixed, and the individual plates' boundaries were finally transgressed. But in some ways this made her work seem even more arbitrary, as it verged on the encyclopedic; now, everything somehow seemed of equal value. Some observers were offended by this apparent lack of commitment to any one style, and also by the tendency of her brushwork, loosening up, but still rather predetermined, to look like "bad" painting. It's part of the extreme self-consciousness of Bartlett's approach to seem disinterested in style, to establish a way of working over a surface and follow it through, no matter what it looks like, and to try for a different look determined by a different set of rules in each painting. And this is the course she has followed since *Rhapsody*. Ultimately, such self-consciousness perhaps leads only to style. And Bartlett's is rather highly developed: it's something light but not too endearing, like a rough-edged, over-clever Dufy. And although the results of her approach are usually blunt and uningratiating, it also occasionally yields paintings so lyrical, their beauty seems gratuitous.

"Swimmers Atlanta" does for Bartlett's sense of touch and gesture what *Rhapsody* did for her subject matter and formal vocabulary: scrambles it, makes it more expansive, generous and accessible. It shows her increasingly able to balance lyrical with harsh,

"good" with "bad" painting within single works. And in this group of pictures, as with some of her other recent work, she finally allows the activity of painting to assume an equal footing with her elaborate narrative and intellectual schemes.

The building in Atlanta offered Bartlett a less than optimum situation to work with: a long granite wall, some 20 feet high and 160 feet long, broken symmetrically into five sections by entrances to hallways, and with a reception desk located in front of the central 35-foot wall. The possibility of a long mural covering and visually connecting any or all of the segments was further discouraged by the fact that this "lobby" is only 22 feet deep, little more than a hallway itself. Viewing distance is thus severely limited from inside, although the entire wall is visible through the mullioned glass front of the building. Bartlett's solution was a series of individual paintings, thematically interrelated, which progress in terms of size and concentrate, one at a time, on the colors of the spectrum. Her theme is swimmers as they encounter different ocean-going phenomena (one per painting)—icebergs, eels, whirlpools, flares, rocks, seaweed, boats—in seas which are predominantly white, black, orange, blue, etc. As if to cover the steps from private to public experience, these works start out at two feet square, intimate, easel-painting size, and proceed incrementally to monumental surfaces 14, 16 and finally 18 feet square, which tower impressively overhead. They invite different viewing distances and times—up close, further off, long, short. When installed, larger and smaller works will alternate, encouraging the viewer to move forward

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and back in space.

The format of all the paintings except one is a vertically bisected square. Half of each work is enamel on steel plates, the other half oil on canvas, forming a physical dichotomy which opposes fragmented with continuous, hard with soft, shiny with matte. Consistent with Bartlett's sense of precision, the areas of canvas and steel in each work are exactly equal but the 1-inch spaces between the steel plates make that side always slightly larger. The only exception to the vertically-bisected square format is the fifth painting in the series, which, occupying the central wall, is a horizontal 5 by 20 feet. This painting, as if to further emphasize its centrality, shows a coming together of all the colors, using the full spectrum.

"Swimmers Atlanta" does for Bartlett's touch and gesture what Rhapsody did for her formal vocabulary: scrambles it, makes it more expansive, generous and accessible.

"Swimmers Atlanta" is consistent with Bartlett's continuing interest in filtering the facts of life and art through her own elaborate system of predetermined strategies. This is a strange ambition, alternately simplistic and encompassing, childlike and grandiose, restricting and liberating. Sometimes it seems that all Bartlett's rules and themes simply serve to gird her up, enabling her to overcome some kind of fear of painting. On the other hand, she also seems interested in just how much information she can get into a painting—and her idea of "information" is not exactly modest. Somewhat like the Impressionists, whom she much admires, there resides behind the largely sunny, convivial disposition of Bartlett's work an obsession, almost scientific, with the large, given constants of the universe and the problems of representing them. Very often her most immediate subjects—the schematized houses, trees, mountains and, lately, figures, which as a group run

Swimmers Atlanta: Boat, 1979, oil on canvas and enamel on steel, 19 feet, 5 inches by 18 feet, 8 inches. All photos eeva-inkeri.

through many of the traditional subjects of art—function primarily to illuminate the effects of things much bigger than themselves: the passage of time, the elements, the seasons, day and night, changes in weather and light. Yet, Bartlett's attention to the real world is countered by her preoccupation with abstraction. She's not so much interested in portraying things as in reorganizing them, encoding them in her own terms, creating a deviant, self-consciously primitive, semi-abstract, alternate system of description.

In "Swimmers Atlanta," the big constant is the ocean, and the small one is the human figure—or Bartlett's codification of it. Her "sign" for the human presence is a simple, featureless ellipse, smooth and flesh-colored (pink, yellow or brown). Both ocean and swimmer have been present in her work for some time—not surprisingly, since Bartlett grew up literally at the ocean's edge, on a peninsula in Long Beach, California, and is no stranger to ocean swimming herself. The ocean has been a recurring motif since *Rhapsody*, where it dominates the closing and most painterly section: an extended sequence of blue plates, varying in tone and brushwork, which seem to wash over the viewer like big particles of water, immersing him in a final epiphany of the sea. The humanoid ellipse first appeared in *Termino Avenue* (1977), where it hovered awkwardly over dry land; it has been in the water ever since, in paintings like *Swimmers in a Storm*, *Tidal Wave*, and *Swimmers at Dawn, Noon and Dusk* (seen in the last Whitney biennial).

Bartlett subjects her ocean swimmer theme to a series of variations, both formal and literary. The result is a loose narrative, a kind of visual list of what can happen in the water. Notes on the preliminary studies exhibited here show that Bartlett, building on the physical duality of her works, designates either the steel or the canvas side of each painting "happy" or "sad," often specifying calm/active or day/night contrasts as well; she also notes details about differences in weather and water conditions between each half (it's raining, it's sunny; the water's choppy, it's glassy). With characteristic ecumenicism, Bartlett seems impelled repeatedly to present two versions, good and bad, more and less dramatic, of the same incident.

Although such clear-cut oppositions are not often obvious in the finished

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paintings, these "stage directions" seem basic to the extraordinary range of color and brushwork Bartlett develops here: the two halves of each painting are painted differently, and each is tonally opposed to its partner. As the series proceeds, the relative placidity or agitation of surface, brightness or somberness of color, floating or cascading of the ellipses, do start to carry stylistic and even expressive weight. For example, the several reds on the "sad," stormy side of *Swimmers Atlanta: Flare* tend to be dark, interspersed with somber yellow-greens and blacks; those on the "happy" side run toward pink, cut with strokes of cheerier blue, purple and white. And here, the triple-stacked dashes become thinner, sharper and more buoyant, as well. It seems that the tension between Bartlett's ideas about reality and what her hand is doing is such that the more explicit her subject, the more she has to encode, and therefore the better she paints. This point is brought home by the central horizontal painting, *Swimmers Atlanta: Buoy*, which uses all colors and, according to Bartlett's notes, has no conditions, and is one of the least engaging works in the series.

The tension between ideas and paint is pinpointed further in Bartlett's titles, which encourage you to examine the surfaces carefully, identifying this yellow arc as a flare, that mass of blue squiggles as seaweed. Occasionally you'll find an incident rather literally depicted, as with the green bottles visible among the orange strokes in *Swimmers Atlanta: Bottle*, or the toy-like ocean liner on the high, tilting horizon of the "happy" side of the big, green *Swimmers Atlanta: Boat*, and sunk to the bottom on its darker "sad" side.

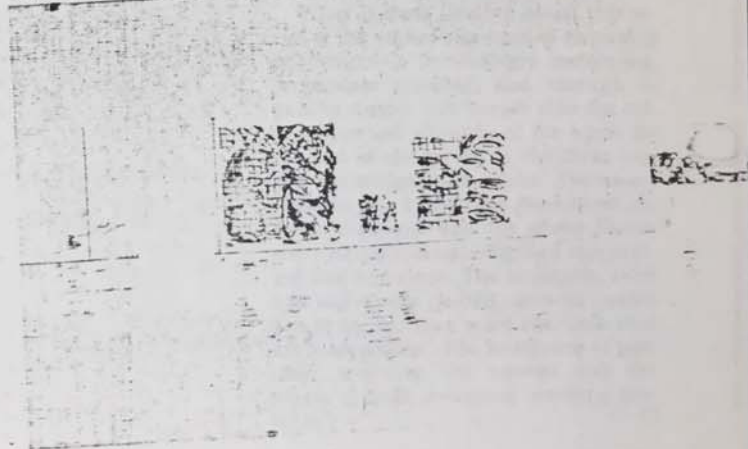
As the ocean changes in color and brushwork, becoming more and more immense with each succeeding painting, it seems increasingly a metaphor for paint and painting itself—just as, perhaps, the ellipses' struggles might refer to Bartlett's own. The series has definite rough spots; the yellow painting, *Swimmers Atlanta: Eel*, seems unarticulated and flat relative to what comes later; the strokes on the smallish black whirlpool painting slip around too much; and in only a few paintings does Bartlett seem as completely at home on canvas as she is on her steel plates, so perfectly suited to the fast, didactic way she likes to paint. But, in toto, the series presents an illuminating odyssey, and as Bartlett progresses from painting to painting she gains confidence and



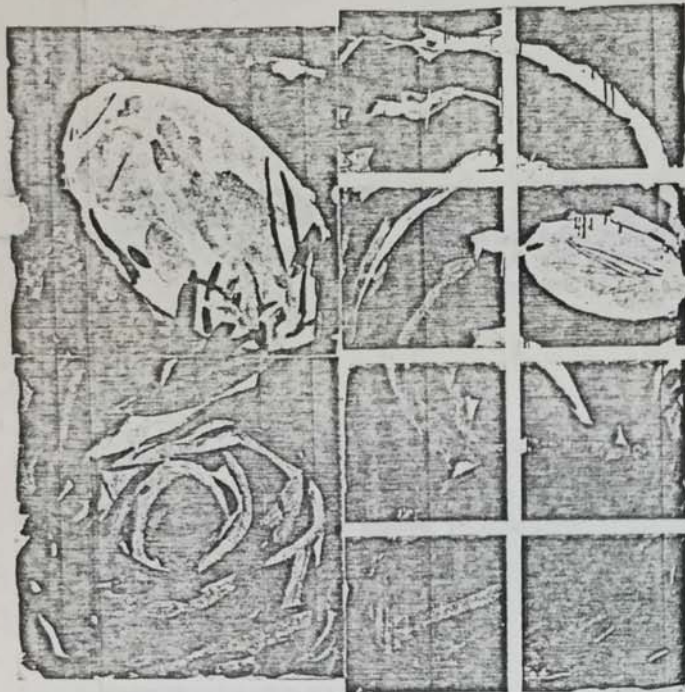
Swimmers Atlanta: Flare, 1979, 12 feet, 11 inches by 12 feet, 5 inches.

Bartlett is interested in encoding reality on her own terms: her "sign" for swimmer is a simple, featureless ellipse.

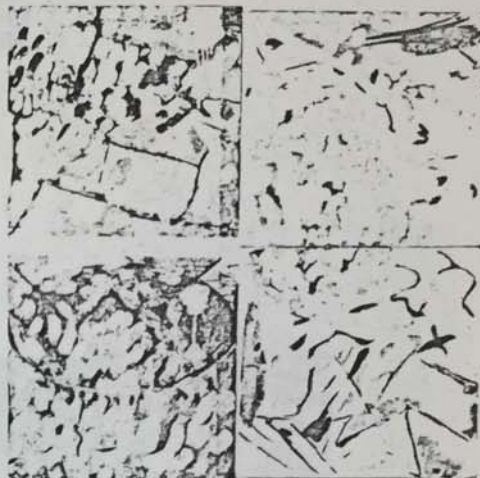
Preliminary study, "Swimmers Atlanta" shows sequence in which paintings will be installed and



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Swimmers Atlanta: Whirlpool (black), 1979, oil on canvas and enamel on steel, 4 feet, 3 inches by 4 feet, 1 inch.



Swimmers Atlanta: Iceberg (white), 1979, oil on canvas and enamel on steel, 2 feet, 1 inch by 2 feet.

spontaneity.

It's thus ironic that the method by which she has arrived at this new free look is not conventionally spontaneous at all; it's actually very controlled. The apparent freedom of Bartlett's painting—transferring freehand to much larger surfaces—the tiny, brushy but highly detailed watercolor studies for

each painting. It's perhaps in character that this almost compulsive procedure should lead her to a new freedom, and the best of these paintings to their own cool, stylish kind of passion. We see her go sweet and sour in alternation, garish and luscious within individual paintings, bringing together the previously separate extremes of her art.

Another result of this peculiar trans-

fer process is an exciting expansion in the scale of the brushwork. From the soft gentle pointillism of the smallest work, *Swimmers Atlanta: Iceberg*, (white), the brushstrokes gradually get bigger and bigger. This expansion brings the viewer in closer and closer to the paint surface itself. Add to this the sometimes complicated spatial effects gained through varying the position of the horizon line in each half of each painting, and you're soon experiencing the paintings as though from the swimmer's point of view—engulfed.

What is most riveting about this series is the viewer's process of becoming submerged in increasingly interesting, large-scale painting, and through it, getting deeper and deeper into the color, space and vibrancy of the work. By the end of the series, in the three biggest paintings—the violet *Swimmers Atlanta: Rock*, the blue *Swimmers Atlanta: Seaweed* and the green *Swimmers Atlanta: Boat*—Bartlett is operating free and clear. The strategies, rules and stories she started out with enable her to do just that, start out; then they are transcended. The brushstrokes take over, spanning the canvas and the plates in huge, sweeping, exulting gestures. □

notes concerning the color, mood and narrative details of each work.



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REVIEWS New York

ULRICH RUCKRIEM, Sperone Westwater Fischer Gallery; JENNIFER BARTLETT, The Clocktower; KIT FITZGERALD and JON SANBORN, Whitney Museum;

JENNIFER BARTLETT is known for her painted sequences that are made up of hundreds of square plates. The squares compose a few larger squares, or frames, which in turn compose the sequence as a whole. Each frame is seen simultaneously as distinct and as connected to the whole; *distinct* inasmuch as one image is rendered there in one style or technique and *connected* inasmuch as the plates are regular and the one image is repeated. This, at least, is the format of a 1976 work called *Rhapsody*.

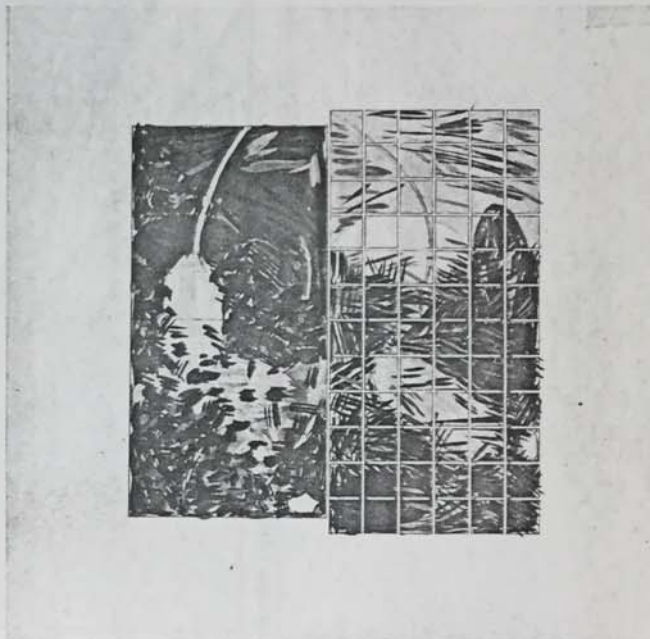
If the title is any clue, Bartlett thinks of her composition in terms of music; and it is true that each frame is somewhat like a musical phrase, or even movement. However, such metaphors or analogues tend to confuse more than clarify. Suffice it to say that the work is at once a composition and a decomposition, a body and an anatomy, a *figure*.

The images in her work are representational, however reductive they may be. This seems to make Bartlett anxious; thus the grid of plates, the musical composition, the manifold styles, the so-given-as-to-be-abstract images. That is, the imagery as such is deemed suspect; and so it is abstracted, or subjected to more or less transparent operations that will qualify the work as modernist. The grid is the best means; it's shorthand for objective, analytical, abstract.

Bartlett, it seems, is torn between the contemporary rage for expression and the older rage for order. This must be a very hard condition in which to work: to feel compelled, under the pressure of modernism, to denature the private and representational nature of her painting. It may also be the very condition for good work; and yet, as it is, she seems neither true to modernism nor her own (apparent) propensity.

Painters today seem less sure than ever about the historicist model of art history. Many see the breakdown as a license; 20th-century art becomes a warehouse of styles that will dress up any private production. Some exhibit the styles as new potential, others as clichés. Some are naively exuberant; others seem moribund.

Recently Bartlett was commissioned to do a series of paintings for a federal building in Atlanta. The nine works are made up of equal areas of stretched canvas and square plates and range from 2 by 2 feet to 18 by 18 feet. *Swimmers for Atlanta* is the rubric, though each work essays the theme in a different way. As her studies show, this



Jennifer Bartlett: Study for Painting #6, Flare/Swimmers Atlanta, 1976-79, gouache, Testor enamels, ink on paper, 21 x 21"

is determined by an operation of set terms: each work is keyed to a season and an astrological sign as well as to a condition of light (color) and a state of water (snow, ice, fog, etc.). The swimmer motif and the ratio of canvas to plate remain constant, as does her code for the canvas as "happy calm" and the plates as "sad active."

This is how the work is generated; which is fine: it provides a given, gets her painting. But she seems to invest more in the system than she gets out. Her terms, codes, or whatever are fairly banal (perhaps if I hadn't seen them spelled out in the studies, I wouldn't think so). It's hard not to decode, and so dissolve, the work, or return it to the status of terms in a notebook.

The swimmer here seems less a repository of art value (the tradition of the bather as reformed in early modern art) than a motif of depletion, even a campy or pop-ish image of banality. And the operations to which it is subjected do not really clarify or complicate it. It is true that what is presented by the canvas is re-presented by the plates, but this is done in a way that neither the

nature of the subject nor the nature of the two media warrants fully.

Swimmers for Atlanta, like *The Swimmer* of Robert Moskowitz, has it both ways: it reads simultaneously as painted field and as water (or ice, etc.); there is a duplicity here as to what is representational and what is abstract that allies the work to new image painting. Many painters today dismiss the representational/abstract dichotomy as a false dichotomy (which is true in one sense) or as a cliché and yet paint and talk of nothing else. They tend to work in ambiguous relation to both kinds of art and to mistake an ironic suspension for a renaissance of potentials.

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TAKING ON WATER

William Zimmer

Jennifer Bartlett

The Clocktower
108 Leonard St. (to Oct. 13)

I'm sure that the considerable failings of Jennifer Bartlett's recently commissioned work, *The Swimmers*, will pale against the eye-popping impact the piece is sure to have on its designated permanent site, the long front lobby wall of the new Richard B. Russell Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Atlanta.

Notwithstanding some eclat from the WPA '30s, commissioned Federal art projects have a history of being vapid or worse. It helps now that the National Endowment is around as a broker. In Bartlett's work though, the government has bought itself a boatload of loud color — and, in other ways, has been sold down the river.

The imagery just doesn't work. I know as well as anybody that in abstract art an image doesn't have to resemble what it is representing, but the "Ellipses," in a gamut of flesh tones that represent the swimmers, are disasters. The water is a slapdash skein of lines of intense color. When the ovals and the tangles meet it looks like Easter — pink eggs in the grass. Southerners unused to Yankee styles won't be the only ones saying "I don't get it." What I get is that Bartlett just can't paint.

The lobby wall in Atlanta is broken up by doorways. To accommodate this architecture Bartlett has devised a noble symmetrical scheme: The central expanse of wall has a horizontal section of the piece and on either side there are vertical elements supposed to represent, à la Monet, various moods. Each element has two parts — a painting done on Bartlett's familiar metal plates about the same image rendered on canvas. There is a small change in mood from the shine of the plates to the matte of the canvas, but Bartlett has deeper aspirations.

According to her notations, the plate half is to represent "sad/active" and the canvas half "happy/calm" or vice versa. But to echo a Southern politician, there isn't a dime's worth of difference between the two states.

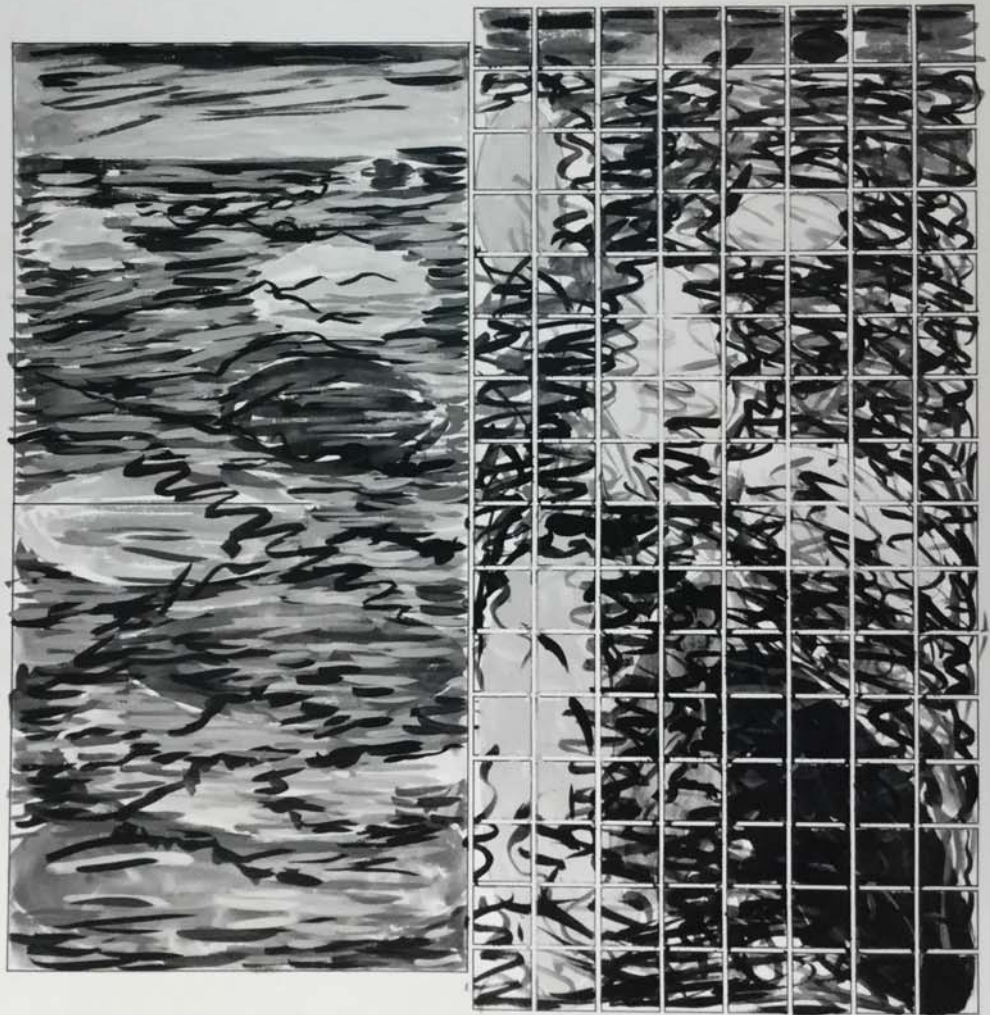
But I applaud the choice of theme. It is inspiring to imply that there is hidden fluidity, a way to churn through the federal bureaucracy.



Bartlett's *Swimmers*: downed in a thrashing of strokes

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JENNIFER BARTLETT

Study for Painting #8 1978-79
-Seaweed/Swimmer Atlanta
Painting size 16' x 16'
Study: gouache, Testor Enamels,
ink on paper
21" x 21"

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JENNIFER BARTLETT

Study for Painting #6 1978-79
Flare/Swimmers Atlanta
Painting size 12' x 12'
Study: gouache, Testor enamels,
ink on paper
21" x 21"

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JENNIFER BARTLETT

SWIMMERS ATLANTA

Commissioned by the Art in Architecture program
of the United States General Services Administration
for the lobby of the new Richard B. Russell Federal Building
and U.S. Courthouse, Atlanta, Georgia.

September 19 - October 13, 1979
Opening Reception, September 19, 6 to 8 pm

The Institute for Art and Urban Resources
The Clocktower
13th Floor, 108 Leonard Street, New York, N.Y. 10013

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Institute for Art and Urban Resources
The Clocktower and P.S.1
Executive Offices: P.S.1, tel: 212 784-2084
This event is made possible with funds from
the New York State Council on the Arts.
Gallery Hours: Wed through Sat, 1 to 6 pm

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Klein's vibrating colors and follow a similar transition of color and use of space as the still-lives and are even looser in brushwork. The most personal work in the show is the physically anonymous being, *The Widow*. The work is a painful, internal portrait courageously presented to the viewer and a collective portrait for the poems on the wall. Another painting, *The Climber*, also differs from the rest of the work. A naked woman, back to viewer, climbs over the debris of male bodies, straining for some unseen vision.

Klein has absorbed the lessons of Matisse, Picasso, and John Graham to create visual expressions of events lived through, savored, and unknown. The show signals artistic and spiritual growth and a chance for men and women to share in Klein's observations of the past year.

—Lorraine Gilligan

Susan Schwalb

(*Robeson Campus Center, Rutgers Univ., October 3-31*) In Susan Schwalb's recent drawings, the natural form of an orchid is transformed into a personal vision. By isolating and enlarging the flower to fill the entire space, she evokes lived experiences or sensual fantasies. Schwalb has associated her choice of image with childhood memories of giving an orchid to her mother on Mother's Day. She also recalls some of the formal dances of her adolescence and the orchids presented to her by escorts. The orchid becomes for her a treasured gift intended for a special person, hence the sensuousness of the image is appropriate. Voluptuous curving petals unfold to reveal the inner flower. The artist parallels the evolution of the orchid series with her own "unfolding," both personally and artistically.

Schwalb uses gold and silverpoint to

create these drawings. The technique was very popular in the Renaissance and earlier, but is rarely used today. Silverpoint requires slow and meticulous effort, but results in rich coloration and textural effects. Schwalb feels that her return to a traditional process was compatible with her search for her own identity as a woman artist. She has gained confidence in her work as her technical ability has developed. After experiencing the limitations of commercially-prepared cameo paper in an initial series of smaller drawings, she began to devise new surfaces in order to change the scale, texture, and tonality of her work. Recent drawings have been produced on paper coated with Chinese watercolor and she is now experimenting with gesso surfaces. The artist varies the pressure of the stroke and utilizes an assortment of metals (copper, wire, gold) to achieve the sensual quality of her work.

Because of the scale of the drawings, generally 30 in. x 40 in., the spectator is engulfed by the curving petals of the orchid and encouraged to "enter" the flower. The image slowly emerges from the depths of the paper and gradually unfolds. But the dominant frontality of the image also asserts the pictorial surface.

The new orchid series affirms Susan Schwalb's technical virtuosity and indicates her willingness to accept the powerfully evocative nature of the large-scale images.

(Also to be exhibited at *Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Douglass College, Rutgers Univ., Nov. 28-Dec. 22*)

—Joan M. Marter

Jennifer Bartlett

(*Paula Cooper Gallery, Oct. 8—Nov. 9*)

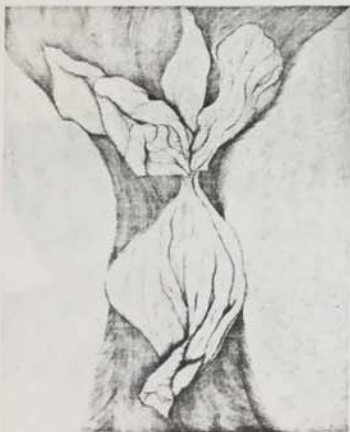
Jennifer Bartlett's new work at Paula Cooper echoes the concerns of her older

work: large paintings or constructs consisting of numerous nine-inch baked enamel on steel squares placed on the wall in grid fashion with tiny nails and assembled into huge rectangular or square formats. Each plate is silkscreened to replicate graph paper and then painted with enamel paint. The whole, a puzzle-like play on the grid...each piece separate and necessary to complete the picture.

The symbol she uses in this show is a simple house. In the past she has used a concert of themes or symbols such as the tree, ocean, mountain and house. Each work in this show is named for a different house.

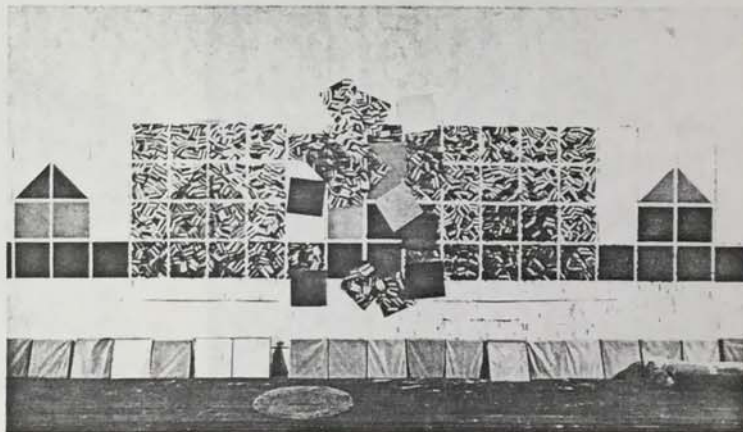
Bartlett is a conceptual painter in that she plots every brush she uses according to number and style, brush stroke, style of application and color. This is explicit in the drawing for the announcement which depicts *27 Howard Street, Day and Night*, a painting that is also in the exhibition. This, a vertical piece, is divided down the center. The left side, *Day House*, is marked off with arcs corresponding to the left side; *Night House*, is marked off with angles. The interlocking spaces within each side are carefully worked out with specific colors and brush stroke, style and number.

Graceland Mansion consists of two 20-ft. long pictures on rear adjacent walls. Here, the house and its shadow are depicted and divided by the grid created by the evenly placed squares in five successive sections. Each section changes in color as affected by the movement of the sun (light to dark, or dawn to dusk). It is reminiscent of Monet's serial concerns and particularly with *Haystacks*. Yet where she is using the light of the sun to change her images in some way, there is also a slight shift in her own angle of vision, making a reference to the artist as a celestial body slowly moving and changing vision by her placement. Jawlensky does this too in his painting, *Meditation Heads* (1935), a head



Susan Schwalb, *Orchid 3.1, 1977. Silverpoint, 40x30". Photo: Jean Kender.*

Womanart/Winter '77-'78



Jennifer Bartlett, *392 Broadway (detail), 1977. Baked enamel, silkscreen grid and enamel on steel, 6'x21'7". Photo: Geoffrey Clements.*

Ba happy decade. Beginning with the shootings at Kent State and ending with the seizure of American citizens in Teheran, the 70's were a disagreeable and divisive decade in almost every department of life in almost every country in the world. We did not even

come. As Miss Kardon and her colleagues have chosen to represent 66 artists by one drawing apiece, it might seem that they go along with this point of view. But their exhibition takes a clearly undefined point of view and is meant to provoke argument, rather than to walk away from it, and in their catalogue the exhibits are divided and sub-

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series which plays subtly with the vertical axis of the canvas. In the brown painting of *Graceland Mansion*, Bartlett uses the same brush stroke throughout all five panels. The blue adjacent piece varies the color tone and stroke according to the light change. She uses dots, long strokes, dabs, plaid, and larger dots.

There are nine paintings in the exhibition and all are beautiful and interesting. Her knowledge of painting and art history is unmistakable and she is clearly a master technician, using both her intellect and hands deftly, yet I find the work cold. This is exemplified by her use of the grid and the tiles which by their obdurate nature seem to prevent anything that hasn't been carefully planned from happening.

—Carolee Thea

Marja Vallila

(Zabriskie Gallery, Sept. 13—Oct. 8) When Marja Vallila came to New York two years ago she was engaged in making large concrete structures and smaller works out of clay. Fragments of architectural motifs appeared in these latter pieces, and this, combined with Vallila's interest in Japanese architecture, is the basis for her current work.

Two small pieces made of metallic grout hint at her interest in space, setting and scale but are too reminiscent of scale model museum displays to be effective. Her large welded steel sculptures of houses and courtyards create architectural settings of beauty and simplicity. Vallila's straightforward approach to sculpture utilizes right and straight angles, yet peering into one of her courtyards a doorway is discovered, one courtyard is sunk into another. The structures take on an air of mystery. Why only one opening? What would it be like to wander around a pas-

sage or house with only one opening? The secretiveness is unyielding and ominous.

Cliff House II is a slender vertical piece effective in isolating a small dwelling in the upper third of the structure. Vallila does not want to reproduce architecture, she wants to evoke a response to spaces that we have experienced or can imagine. The artist feels that one of the viewer's strongest visual memories is her response to dwellings previously inhabited. The viewer has the experience of being reduced to one of the elements of an integrated situation that architecture imposes.

Vallila draws not only upon the viewer's memory of experiences with architectural spaces but sharpens our recall in viewing a work of art. She has created sculptures that are impossible to take in at a glance. On closer inspection a passage appears then disappears, a wall hides a dwelling and courtyard, light shifts. There are no tricks involved, just a prod from Vallila to look and relate one part of a structure to another, one structure to the other. There is continuity in her work and ideas; refinement is evident in the latest work, eager anticipation awaits the new.

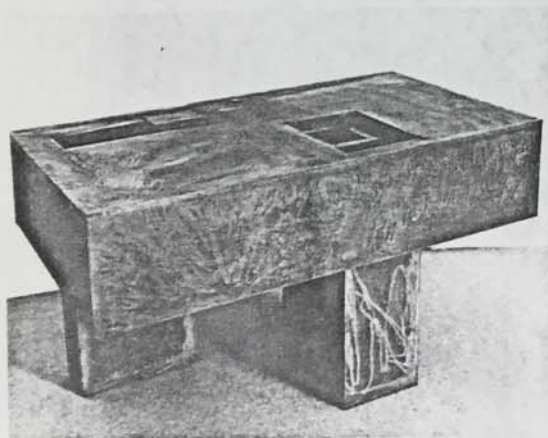
—Lorraine Gilligan

Helen Meyrowitz / Sandra Gross

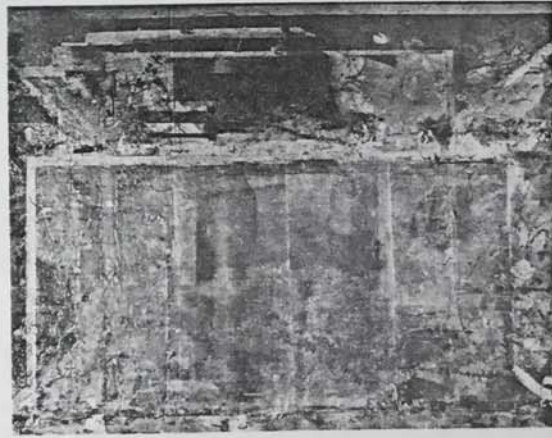
(Central Hall Gallery, Sept. 28-Oct. 16) Individual and powerful, the works of Helen Meyrowitz and Sandra Gross shared the space of Central Hall Gallery. Meyrowitz's series of conte drawings, "From Closets and Drawers," consisted of carefully rendered "portraits" of a bra, shirt, and a bikini bathing suit. She chooses feminine, personal articles and then explores their formal qualities. Although there are no humans present, the clothing becomes an extension of human presence.

One senses a lingering warmth from recent body contact. Meyrowitz said that she became fascinated with the figure-eight rhythm of an underwire bra that she had tacked on the wall for close observation. Many of her works explore this object showing the wire bottom creating a hard outline, while the loose nylon top is folded, compressed, or left dangling. Meyrowitz builds volume in her forms through meticulous chiaroscuro modeling. With sensuously rich gray tonalities, she creates almost tangible objects whose volume is intensified because of the flat space that makes up the rest of the composition. She manipulates this shallow space through effective use of multiple imagery, shadow, and the suggestion of a horizon line. Her precise drafting technique is balanced by a free gestural line which distinguishes the images from photography. In viewing these works, one is comfortable with the familiarity of the subjects, a bit uneasy because of their intimacy, and challenged by their unreal isolation which turns empty bikinis and bras into studies of rhythm, shape and form.

Complexity and unity coexist in the Tao Series by Sandra Gross. As the name implies, she has been influenced by Oriental philosophy and calligraphy. Her works are abstract collage paintings created by building layers of stain painting, rice paper, and mixed media. The result is an intricate three-dimensional surface which is simultaneously thick, tactile, shiny, transparent and encrusted. Unity is achieved through an overall coloring and texture; the effect is remarkably restful. The subtlety with which each layer both exposes and veils the previous one is analogous to the layering of history in civilization; the last layer is a natural outcome of all the previous influences. The canvases hang freely, without stretchers, as Oriental scrolls or tattered quilts. Gross mainly uses muted pinks and rosy beiges on which random, indecipherable, calli-



Marja Vallila. Double Sink House, 1977. Welded steel, 37x65x36". Photo: John A. Ferrari.



Sandra Gross. Tao #3, 1977. Mixed media, 78x78". Photo: Otto E. Nelson.

Ba happy decade. Beginning with the shootings at Kent State and ending with the seizure of American citizens in Teheran, the 70's were a disagreeable and divisive decade in almost every department of life in almost every country in the world. We did not even

come. As Miss Kardon and her colleagues have chosen to represent 66 artists by one drawing apiece, it might seem that they go along with this point of view. But their exhibition takes a clearly undefined point of view and is meant to provoke argument, rather than to walk away from it, and in their catalogs the exhibits are divided and subdivided

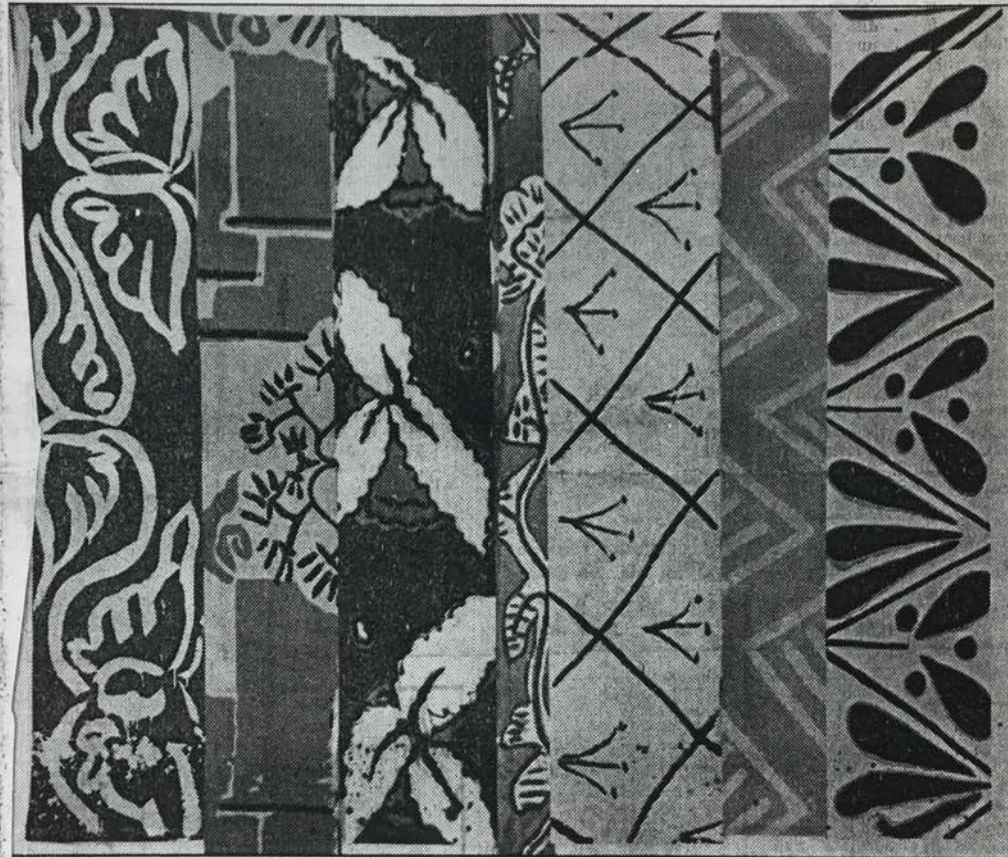
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THE NEW YORK TIMES, S

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"Clifford Still was not as immune from the culture of his times as he liked to aver." (Hilton Kramer)



Harry Shunk

Kim MacConnel's "Baton Rouge," in Edward Lucie-Smith's "Art of the Seventies"

GALLERY VIEW

JOHN RUSSELL

70's Art in Public Places— From Anchorage to Atlanta

By no stretch of hyperbole could the 1970's be called a happy decade. Beginning with the shootings at Kent State and ending with the seizure of American citizens in Teheran, the 70's were a disagreeable and divisive decade in almost every department of life in almost every country in the world. We did not even

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ORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JULY 6, 1980



One of the most forceful of the polemics in question is by John Perreault, whose subject is the decorative art that is represented in the show by Kim MacConnel, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Zakantich, Tina Girouard and others. There are those who think that decorative art exists not so much to bind up the wounds of the nation as to smother it in connection with the past. But Mr. Perreault won't buy that for a moment. Decorative art in his view "challenges the racism and sexism of the art system," clears the way for a new global consciousness, and in general clears up something of the mess that the 70's left behind.

Decorative Art is much to the fore likewise in "Art in the Seventies" by Edward Lucie-Smith (Cornell University Press, \$29.95 hardback, \$14.95 paperback). Mr. Lucie-Smith takes the whole world for his field. The subject of his investigations is what he sees as the ongoing battle to the death between mandarin taste and a ruder and more vindictive view of the future for art. He has a strong stomach, a ready pen, and the most ecumenical eye in the Western world. To what extent the contents of this book will have a long and happy life as art can be debated, but as a contribution to the cultural history of a decade that is now (and none too soon) behind us, "Art in the Seventies" will have a permanent currency.

And what did art make of those unhappy days? Three new publications have any means all say the same thing. The first of these publications is the catalogue of an exhibition called "Across the Nation: Fine Art for Federal Buildings 1972-1979," which will be on view through Sept. 1 at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. The catalogue tells us what only the full-time traveler in this country can have seen for himself: that in almost every state of the Union the Federal Government, through the Art-in-Architecture Program of the General Services Administration, has put up the money for major works of art in Federal buildings. Joshua C. Taylor tells us in his preface that more than 140 works of art have been commissioned in this way at a cost of a little under \$5-million dollars.

What this means in practical terms is that all the way from Anchorage to Honolulu, and Charlotte Amalie in the Virgin Islands, people will henceforth be confronted by 70's art whenever their business takes them either to the Federal building or to the U.S. Courthouse. The artist's responsibility, of course, all the greater in that neither of these is a place in which we expect to have a good time. His role is therefore to uplift, encourage and console in an era that has no accepted idiom for any of these functions. We have only to think of the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris or of the former League of Nations headquarters in Geneva to remember that some of the greatest artists of our century have fallen short when set a task of that kind.

Given that we have no one accepted idiom for public art, and given also that we wouldn't stand for Governmental dictation in such matters, it follows inevitably that the works in question are of every imaginable kind. In Anchor- age, for instance, visitors to the courthouse will find in the stairwell an outside image of a bull walrus by a local artist named Alvin Amason. "The painting is oil on canvas," the catalogue tells us, "with wood, aluminum, brass screws, attached paper-mache birds, a silk rose, and walrus tusks." It sounds like a fun idea, and yet the result will not cause the courthouse to be picketed by lovers of the walrus. I can imagine many a worse thing to look at on one's way to arraignment.

As each of the 140 and more commissions is filtered back and forth between one appointed body and another, it is natural that many of them settle for already prestigious artists. When commissions of this sort go to Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, Frank Stella, Al Held, Sam Francis, Claes Oldenburg, Sol LeWitt and Alexander Liberman, we are entitled to say — with no disrespect to the final result — that the city in question is honoring itself as much as it honors the artist.

All the more reason, therefore, to congratulate the cities that opt for a more difficult solution. George Sugarman's sculpture in front of the courthouse in Baltimore undeniably has overtones of relaxation and reassurance that make it something more than a big exhibition piece that happens to fit the site. Jennifer Bartlett's enormous mural of swimmers, now installed in Atlanta is another piece that relates directly to the business of the building in question: human beings at risk in tumultuous seas are not so far from human beings on the witness stand or in the dock.

If we consider that, apart from these adventurous commissions, the Government has also stood behind Leonard Baskin's relief portraits of three former Presidents from Tennessee and James Beal's four huge panels on "The History of Labor in America," it will be clear that the program has stood throughout for a pluralist aesthetic. That aesthetic is also present, though in a more stringent form, in "Drawings: The Pluralist Decade," which is the catalogue of an exhibition organized by Janet Kardon that can be seen through Sept. 30 in the American Pavilion in the Venice Biennale.

Pluralism is regarded by those who don't like it as an es- thetic in which more or less anything is more or less wel- come.

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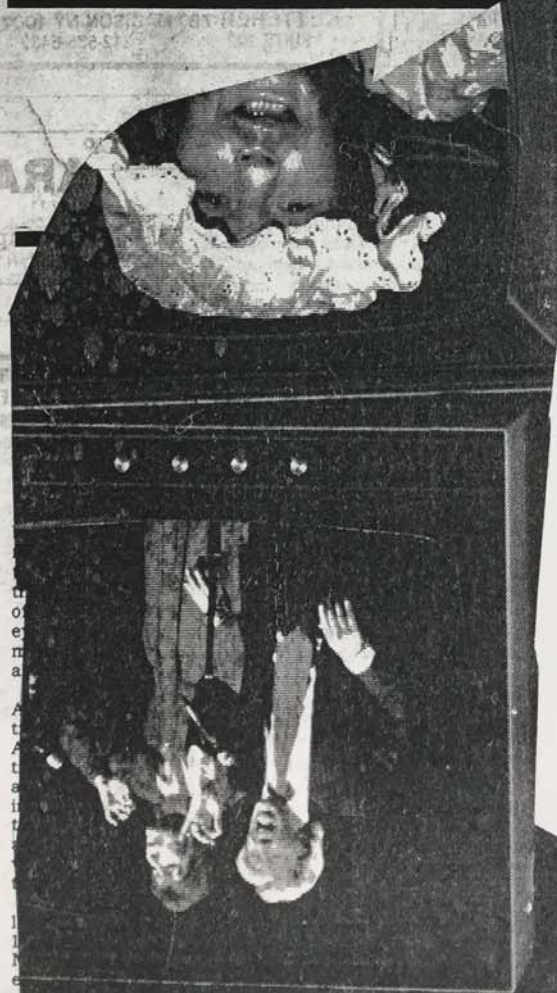
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