

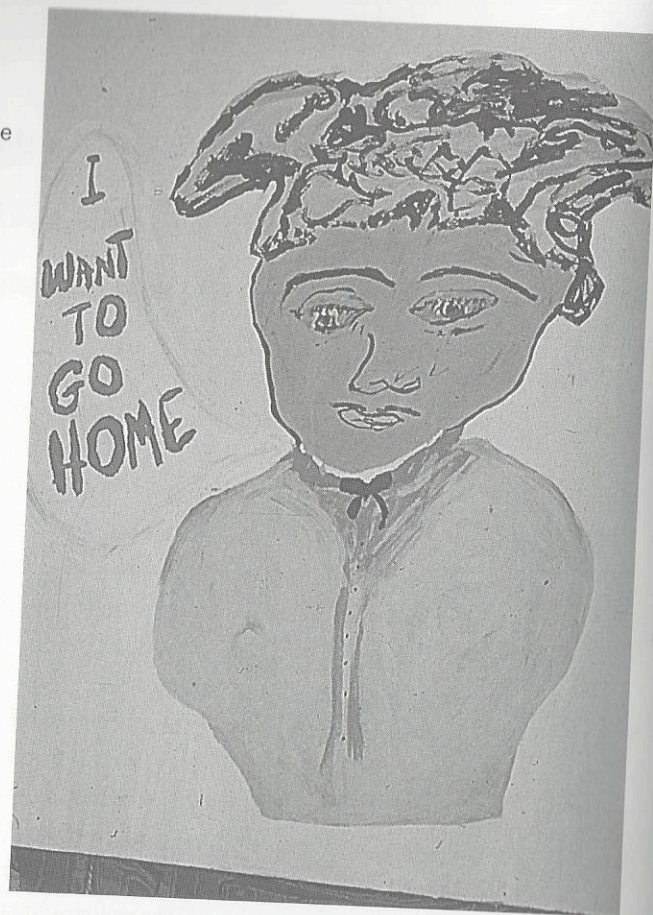
Making Art, Reclaiming Lives:

The Artist and Homeless Collaborative

In 1972, the sculptor Robert Smithson noted, "Art should not be considered as merely a luxury but should work within the process of actual production and reclamation."¹ Although Smithson was referring particularly to land reclamation, within about a decade it had grown clear that in addition to poisoned, devastated plots of land (and abandoned, "bombed-out" buildings), people, too, had become part of the detritus of the nation's commodity-driven, progress-obsessed social structure. By the mid-1980s, hundreds of thousands of people without homes of their own were living on the streets and in parks, in shelters and welfare hotels, in cars and abandoned buildings, under bridges and underground.² To the rest of society these were bag ladies, beggars, bums—labels that in recent years have been subsumed in the more general and constituent-referenced "homeless," a term that, though an improvement, nevertheless remains problematic not only for its lack of precision but also for implying homogeneity among people temporarily or chronically without homes of their own. Whatever the appellation, these are a community's excommunicants, its untouchables, the people from whom society at large averts its eyes, giving them little more consideration than it does wasted, ravaged plots of land.

If, as Smithson suggested, art can serve as a means of reclaiming areas of land devastated through misuse or neglect, can similar applications be made where people are concerned? Can art help society's "throwaways" to reclaim positions as independent, functioning members of the community? Can it provide a means for people living on the edges to participate fully in their own reclamation, becoming the codesigners rather than the mere recipients of programs created to

Gerti C., *I Want to Go Home*, 1990. Acrylic on cardboard, 48" x 48". Houses painted on cardboard by Park Avenue resident artists were mounted on sticks and carried in a candlelight procession as part of the *Day of the Dead* exhibition at the Alternative Museum. Gerti, who had described herself as a "shy artist," contributed two houses and this portrait.



facilitate their reintegration? Can art—whose practice often is considered a luxury, and whose product, at least in recent years, may be considered solely for its market value—have any appreciable impact on the lives of people struggling merely to survive? Finally, can art function as a kind of operating theater in which the often polarized segments of a community come together to create something not seen before?

Hope Sandrow, founder of the Artist and Homeless Collaborative (A&HC), would surely say it can. An affiliation of artists and arts professionals and women, children, and teenagers living in New York City shelters, the A&HC is an ongoing, interactive project that neither abandons nor alienates the art work from its social context. Art is made *with* rather than *for* shelter residents, who become the very cocreators of the project's output.³ "The relevancy of art to a commu-

nity," according to the A&HC's statement of purpose and history, "is exhibited in artworks where the homeless speak directly to the public and in discussions that consider the relationship art has to their own lives." The practice of creating art, the statement continues, "stimulates those living in shelters from a state of malaise to active participation in the artistic process." Indeed, the assumption that getting people in crisis up from their narrow dormitory beds or away from common-room television sets and into the process of making art is transformative seems frequently to have been borne out. According to Sandrow, a large number of those residents of the Park Avenue Shelter for Homeless Women (the locus of most A&HC activity to date) who have been most actively involved with A&HC programs have managed to make their way out of the shelter and into apartments or subsidized housing; some continue making art on their own and some also work with the A&HC as volunteers or paid assistants. Sandrow attributes this progression, at least in part, to the collaborative art making, which she believes offers residents a positive experience of self-motivation and helps them regain what the shelter system and the circumstances of their lives conspire to destroy: a sense of individual identity *and* confidence in human interaction.

The A&HC's articulated goals are to help shelter residents cultivate personal and community self-expression, to provide the means for residents' self-representation, and to create a more stimulating shelter environment. But any inquiry into the nature of the relationship between the community and public or activist art is incomplete if we assume that the sole purpose of such work is to enrich or transform the lives of a constituency targeted to "receive" the work's intended benefits. If we are to avoid reinforcing the rift between the haves and the have-nots, we must consider as well whether the professional artist can be reclaimed, set free from the ivory tower art world and notions of "hotness," rescued from what Martha Rosler has called "museums built to contain and amuse the professional managerial sector plunked down in the middle of moldering center-city decay."⁴

By myth and romantic tradition, artists have lived on the *bohème*-like fringes, sacrificing material comfort to the pursuit of truth and beauty. While indeed many artists have lived on the financial margins (and even today few can survive on the sale of their work alone), the

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1980s saw, concurrent with the explosion of homelessness, the emergence of art stardom, a phenomenon that rendered numerous artists the darlings of the very society whose social, artistic, and cultural temperature it might be said was their responsibility to take, whose strictures and conventions their duty to puncture. If Art with a capital A began losing stature when Pop art and the social revolutions of the 1960s helped bridge the gap between high and low culture, art (little “a”) grew more accessible, gaining a measure of general acceptance and even respectability. Over the next two decades, artists, more visible than ever and more secure in the legitimacy of their endeavor, learned to turn out marketworthy products to be snatched up by collectors, museums, even speculators.

No longer a rarefied pursuit existing apart from quotidian concerns, the process and product of art became subject to the same mood swings as society at large did, and by the time the market hit its peak in 1989, the idealism of the 1960s had turned to the disillusionment of the 1970s, to the cynicism of the 1980s. Art had become, in the words of critic and historian Allan Schwartzman, “a commodity within a system of commodities.”⁵ To say that the making and marketing of art was not immune to the kind of general cynicism expressed everywhere from Madison Avenue to Wall Street is not to imply that artists are wrong to seek and receive recognition and fair compensation or that the only “true” artist is a starving—or better yet, a dead—artist. (There are, it seems, those who would disagree. Schwartzman, writing about the artist Jenny Holzer, notes that in the 1980s, successful artists experienced an ironic fate: “The art market turned them into celebrities, then savaged them when they became too big.”)⁶ Nor is it to say that art comprehension should remain the exclusive property of the intelligentsia, art ownership of the wealthy. But, as Schwartzman points out, as “art” became aware of its own investment potential, its values and identity shifted.⁷

What concerned Sandrow (who was having a show, it seemed, every time you turned around) is that in many cases the makers, sellers, and consumers of art that addressed vital social concerns grew increasingly isolated from the works’ subjects, remaining safely en-

sconced within the boundaries of privilege. Sandrow was disturbed by what she considered a genre of art that addressed social issues while remaining, along with its makers, largely isolated and insulated from the realities of those very issues: “There was a lot of discussion about the problems, but artists assumed the authority of speaking about people and issues they had no firsthand experience with. I saw art works produced within the isolation of the studio, and exhibited in places many of those affected by the issues do not have access to.” Works of art whose very *raison d’être* was to incite political, social, and cultural conversation went to galleries, museums, private collections—end of discussion. Certainly there have been exceptions. John Ahearn’s decision to distance himself from the world of art-market privilege is in itself a political choice, and Ahearn apparently is most comfortable when the art he makes in the Bronx neighborhood where he lives, works, and finds inspiration stays close to home. Both Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger have continued producing provocative works, much of it for public spaces; even if it’s true—and I’m not sure it is—that a majority of viewers “don’t understand what’s going on,”⁸ Holzer’s *Torture Is Barbaric* and Kruger’s untitled billboard that asks, “Who speaks? Who is silent?” have a political bite that is hard to ignore.

Yet even if gallery and museum walls were to come tumbling down, it would be a mistake to assume that art that documents, interprets, or comments upon society’s ills offers a complete picture of those ills; such works, though significant, can be considered only part of the conversation about social problems, and perhaps a relatively small part at that. Thus, while a picture of a homeless person (for example) may provoke, move, inspire, enrage, engage, etc., such an image is homelessness *interpreted*; as such, it offers a fixed, limited understanding of the condition of homelessness. The homeless person, merely the subject of the photograph, has been effectively left out of the conversation. As the photographer Mel Rosenthal points out, the more he wanted someone to make “a magic picture that could be used to help end homelessness,” the more he doubted the possibility of realizing such an endeavor. Studying his own and other photographs of homeless people, Rosenthal observed that “the people seemed almost pinned to the paper.”⁹

Andres Serrano came under some criticism for his 1991 *Nomads* series, in which his subjects—homeless people photographed against portable backdrops that separated them from any context—appear as objects of near-heroic beauty. Such pictures may serve to enhance their subjects' self-esteem and allow the viewer to see people without homes in a new, more dignified, light; they say nothing whatsoever about the conditions of poverty, discrimination, violence, addiction, lack of shelter. Similarly, Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle* and proposed *Union Square Projections* make powerful statements but are open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The vehicle, designed with Rudolph Luria in consultation with homeless men Alvin, A., Ian, Oscar, and Victor, might be a practical temporary solution

The Artist and Homeless Collaborative is Sandrow's attempt to close the gap between art making and social action.

for those in need of safe, mobile shelter; or it might be a metal cage in which to confine undesirables while absolving society of responsibility for finding lasting solutions. For *Union Square*, Wodiczko proposed projecting onto that park's heroic and allegorical sculptures images of bandages, wheelchairs, shopping carts, and other accoutrements of homelessness in order to bring attention to the plight of already displaced people further displaced by revitalization of the park and gentrification of the neighborhood. Again, the images may not have conveyed the intended message with sufficient clarity, and the project, though provocative, goes only so far, as Vivien Raynor's halfhearted praise suggests: "As a proposal, it does nothing for the homeless, but as art it is entertaining and poignant."¹⁰

In her own art making, Hope Sandrow takes a more impressionistic approach to social issues, resulting in works of a less overtly political nature. At first glance her photographs and photographic compositions, which began attracting attention in the early to mid-1980s, turning up in the company of more established artists like David Hockney, Annie Liebovitz, and Robert Mapplethorpe (at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art in 1984), and Frank Stella, Robert Morris, and James Turrell (in the Hirshhorn Museum's *Directions 1986*), seem to be of a very personal nature; works with titles like *Truth Artfully Engaged*, *Act Like He Wants*, and

Memories Incapable of Proof offer deliberately obscured, fragmented views of existence, connection, and memory.

Uninterested in freezing moments on celluloid, Sandrow uses her camera to explore reality's ambiguous, experiential qualities. Seen through her lens, life does not unfold in clear and logical sequence, nor is it easily or immediately interpretable; and in contrast to most photography, in her work time almost never stands still. Sandrow, whom one reviewer called "*une virtuose de bougé*," (a virtuoso of movement)¹¹ was making work another called "extremely perplexing."¹² These writers may have grasped something essential about the work that others who gushed about its "romantic" or "nostalgic" qualities perhaps did not. *Hope & Fear*, a series of arranged and composed pictures taken in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which Sandrow considers the ultimate expression of society's Big Lie—that life is ordered and aesthetically categorizable, that good and evil can be clearly delineated, that reward and punishment are fittingly conferred—juxtaposes the museum's version of reality with Sandrow's own. Acknowledging that everything is subject to interpretation, Sandrow makes no pretense of clear-eyed objectivity. That hers are substantial works of art, that they say something, seems sure—precisely *what* they say may indeed be too perplexing to be understood by most viewers. As Sandrow herself has said, her social commentary is "not that apparent because my work seems more abstract. But the world is abstract. The more I observe the world, the clearer it is that there's never one truth."¹³

Perhaps it is unfair to hold artists like Wodiczko and Serrano responsible for not having a greater impact on society's ills, or for their inability to control the way their work is understood, or to fault Sandrow for failing to make more obvious ties between the personal and the political; the artist's primary responsibility, after all, is to make art. The Artist and Homeless Collaborative, however, is Sandrow's attempt to close the gap between art making and social action. If the work itself consists of bringing arts professionals and shelter residents together to make art, it is less about social change on the grand scale than about empowering individuals and eliminating the boundaries that keep the privileged and the underprivileged so far apart. For Sandrow, the A&HC is a means of extending her own

artistic dialogue to the people who experience some of the very ills she sought to address as an artist and citizen:

I'd been doing so many exhibitions, and wanted to get more involved in the community. . . . I felt that if I was creating art about issues, it had to be connected to real people and real things. . . . [Homelessness] was an issue I saw every time I walked out the door. . . . I wanted to know how it came about that [people] had lost their homes, were no longer part of their families. I wanted to understand, but I never knew what they thought—I could only read about them. I thought that art, which was what I had to offer, could be a means for them to speak for themselves.

Sandrow began her inquiry in 1987 by volunteering at the Catherine Street Family Shelter in Chinatown. There, while making art and producing a resident-written newsletter, she learned that “homelessness” is hardly the most accurate of terms. Rather, the state of homelessness should be seen as a potential result of combining *poverty* with any of a host of other conditions (among them job loss, domestic violence, racial and sexual discrimination, addiction, economic violence, immigrants’ needs, illness, and injury).¹⁴ Without question, homeless people need decent, affordable housing; still, the failure for many years of both politicians and advocates to acknowledge the connection between homelessness and related conditions is evident in the fact that after more than a decade, the situation has little improved and has probably worsened.¹⁵

As Peter Rossi explains in *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, “Homelessness is more properly viewed as the most aggravated state of a more prevalent problem, *extreme poverty*. . . . *Literal homelessness*, as I have come to call having no home to go to, is a condition of extreme deprivation, but it is only a step away from being *precariously housed*—having a tenuous hold on housing of the lowest quality.”¹⁶ While acknowledging the weight of economic factors in creating homeless populations, Rossi asserts that it is certain personal characteristics (and, it should be added, conditions) that will likely determine who among the extremely poor is likely to become literally homeless.¹⁷ Though there is debate about whether *some* of those characteristics and conditions (e.g., extreme depression, drug

abuse, low self-esteem, mental instability) are the causes or the consequences of homelessness, one thing seems clear: those problems, as well as domestic violence, sexual abuse, illness and injury, job loss, learning disabilities, and so forth, occur in all strata of society. But when one is *extremely poor*, there may be no safety nets: no family to turn to for temporary housing or financial or emotional support; no savings account to draw from or credit cards to borrow against; insufficient social services and little awareness of, or tools for accessing, services that do exist. Even the shelter system, while providing “three hots and a cot,” may offer little else in the way of services that would contribute to the alleviation of homelessness.

Sandrow was appalled by what she saw at Catherine Street, where, she charges, male recreational aides distributed supplies to female residents in exchange for sex; goods donated for residents were taken home by staff members; and each classroom in the former school building housed as many as a dozen people. “It was really horrific,” she recalls. “Young girls having to get dressed in front of strange men, couples having sex when others were in the room, people fighting in the hallways, drug overdoses.” Deeply affected by the misery that was Catherine Street, Sandrow recalls that it often took days to recover from her visits. Still, not until 1988, when her blossoming career suffered a derailment after an accident destroyed two years’ worth of work she had made for a solo show in New York and an installation at the Amsterdam Art Fair, did she finally begin to understand how it felt to have no control over one’s own life; the incident, in fact, triggered a bout of post-traumatic stress syndrome related to what she describes as a “challenging” childhood and young adulthood. (Later, working on biographical art pieces with residents of the Park Avenue Shelter, Sandrow discovered that many had experienced sexual abuse; a survivor of rape and sexual abuse herself, she began to see how much she had in common with the women there.)

Sandrow threw herself into her work at Catherine Street until, in 1989, a conflict with an otherwise supportive and appreciative director forced her to leave. (The problem, says Sandrow, was the director’s attempts to censor the art work and resident-written newsletter.) The Human Resources Administration’s Adult Services Division (which handled homeless services prior to the creation of the Department of

Homeless Services in July 1993) offered her other sites, and Sandrow chose the Park Avenue Armory, which houses women over the age of forty-five. At first, Sandrow had a hard time convincing the residents that art could have an important place in their lives. The irony, she recalls, was that “our conversations paralleled those that were going on in the country in general—this was around the time of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) controversy over the funding of a Mapplethorpe exhibition. The women, like much of the general public, couldn’t understand the value of art in their lives.” Eventually, Sandrow’s persistence (visiting the dormitory, she would go from bed to bed, individually inviting each woman to participate) paid off, and each week several women gathered to make art. As the Park Avenue projects grew in scope, and Sandrow invited other artists to participate, raising money became necessary. (Visiting artists receive a \$1,000 honorarium, which some have donated back to the organization, and \$500 for art supplies.) The politics of grant-seeking—the NEA, in fact, awarded Sandrow her first shelter project grant—required that Sandrow’s efforts be formalized; a board of directors was created and the nonprofit sponsorship of the New York Foundation for the Arts established. (The organization was granted its own not-for-profit status in 1992.) Thus, the Artist and Homeless Collaborative was born.

By bringing other artists and organizations to the shelter, residents were exposed to a variety of media and artistic and political sensibilities. Artists Kiki Smith, Keiko Bonk, John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, Pepon Osorio, Whitfield Lovell, Simon Leung, Vince Gargiulo, Ida Applebroog, Judith Shea (these last two are A&HC board members), and others have collaborated with participants on everything from life drawing to plaster casting, transfer printing to landscape painting, ceramic tile work to doll making. A collaboration with the Guerrilla Girls resulted in the creation of posters addressing rape, domestic violence, and homelessness, and Visual AIDS hired Park Avenue residents to make that advocacy group’s ubiquitous red ribbons. In 1990, Dina Helal, coordinator of Family and Community Programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, proposed the creation of an arts education program for homeless children. Sandrow agreed to supply the children if Helal would take

“I’ve begged.”

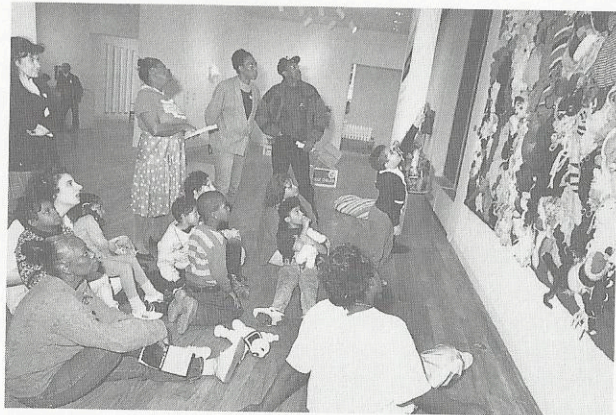
**“Yes, I have eaten out of garbage cans.
I’ve had coffee thrown in my face.
They tell me to get a job.
They don’t know your problem.
If you stand in a food place looking
pitiful enough, someone will
buy you a sandwich.
I’ve had people buy me a meal and
bring it back to me, throw it in
the garbage and tell me to get it.”**

—RESIDENT OF N.Y.C. WOMEN’S SHELTER
IN COLLABORATION WITH
GUERRILLA GIRLS
AND

ARTIST &
HOMELESS
COLLABORATIVE

The Guerrilla Girls and Park Avenue Shelter residents, 1992. One of three posters made following discussions about rape, physical abuse, and homelessness.

adult women as well, and the two designed the After School Art Education Program, in which children from the Regent Family Residence gather at the Whitney at Philip Morris to study, discuss, and make art. Helal and visiting visual and performing artists lead the programs, assisted by women’s shelter residents who have been trained and receive stipends to work as teachers’ aides; more recently, four teenagers from the Regent have also been hired to work as aides. For six months in 1991, a Warhol Foundation grant provided the A&HC with seed money to collaborate with the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney on the development of a model arts education program. Nonartists as well have elected to jump on Sandrow’s collaborative bandwagon, and the project has grown to become the umbrella for several short- and long-term projects, including yoga classes, a literature club, a newsletter, lecture series and seminars, and



Children from the Regent Family Residence discuss Mike Kelley's *More Love Ours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages of Sin* with trained teachers' aides from the Park Avenue Shelter and staff from the Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable.

résumé-writing assistance, this last at the Lexington Avenue Shelter for homeless women, which houses women who are employed or deemed employable.

So much disparate activity renders the A&HC rather amorphous; its activities and sometimes even its purpose are not easily categorized or understood. (Sandrow views this state as a natural result of the organization's fluidity, which she considers a necessary adaptation to the transient nature of shelter life.) But no matter what the organization's activities, its heart is collaboration, and that is loosely defined. It may mean the collaborative creation of a "traditional" art object such as *The Four Seasons*, a four-panel acrylic painting by visiting artist Keiko Bonk and resident artists Lonzetta P., Audrey J., Olivia S., Geraldine W., and Maxine L. It may consist of individually executed components that together make a single art work, such as *Three Views: The Life of Geraldine Womack*. An assemblage that investigates both portraiture and the way society typically views the poor and disenfranchised, the work's three framed pieces include an essay about the life of resident Geraldine Womack, written by Sandrow in the style of a typical news feature and printed to look like a published article; a palladium print portrait of Womack by Michael O'Neill; and a self-portrait "quilt" of color Polaroids by Womack and Sandrow. Collaboration may branch in several directions, involving the participation of a variety of individuals and organizations: Visiting artists Julie Carson and Aaron Keppel organized AIDS education seminars that were conducted by members of ACT-UP and the

Julie Carson, Aaron Keppel, Amy Brelzie, Claudia, Dorothy, Edna, Geraldine, Gerti C., Harparkash, Kachi, Lucille, Maxine, Olivia, Pearl, Polly Ann, and Shirley, *Self Taught/Self Represented: Homeless Women and AIDS*, 1990. 16" x 22". This AIDS awareness poster, the result of a mega-collaboration, lists resources for treatment. English and Spanish text, provided by residents, includes: "If he doesn't want to use a condom, he can forget about me."

"AIDS is a serious illness caused by the HIV virus which weakens the body's natural defenses against infection. If you use drugs you can get AIDS when you share needles, syringes or works. When you have sex with an infected person you can get AIDS if you don't use a condom. There is no way to know from looking at someone if he or she has AIDS. So you must always use a condom. O mi hombre no quiere usar un condome, se puede olvidar del sexo. O If you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex use a latex condom (rubber). Don't use oil based lubricants with a condom, as they weaken the latex. If you shoot drugs make sure you clean your works, needle, and syringe with bleach and water before each use. O Antes de inyectarte, limpia los aparatos. O If he doesn't want to use a condom, he can forget about me all together. I should love myself first, because all too often if a woman is sick, the man says goodbyes. O El amor no te da SIDA, el amor sin los condones te da SIDA. O The Centers for Disease Control lists all opportunistic infections that are associated with AIDS. However, one should know that this list is incomplete; the diseases women often get with AIDS are not always on their list. The following are symptoms that affect women with AIDS: a severe yeast infection that won't go away even with medication; severe cramps that won't go away even when you're not having your period. O There are no homeless people or IV drug users in clinical trials for AIDS treatment because they say we are not responsible. Homeless people are in shelters not because they are incompetent, but because of unfortunate circumstances. Homeless people can vote, why can't they go into clinical trials? O When I say we should be aware—People should try and come together—And end this nightmare—AIDS is the virus—that's lethal if you panic—I don't have a best friend—And if I don't discontinue—We should teach it in schools—So the young could be warned—And we should care about babies—Before they are born—So the way to prevent—is for the state to be known—Use a condom, clean your needles—And teach it at home—That's the only 4 ways to catch it—So you got to be safe—And I'm a say it again—AIDS don't discriminate—you can catch it from sex—And you don't have to be gay—You can be straight up and clean—And still catch AIDS—And those who cheat drugs—through a middle syringe—So tire to clean your works—before you shoot with your friends. O There is a 30% - 50% chance of a woman with AIDS giving birth to an infected baby. Some people think there are your odds, some people think they are bad. But a woman should not be forced to have an abortion. She should be allowed to have the baby or to terminate the pregnancy. It should be her choice. O We should make information accessible to families of PWAs and HIV+ people. They didn't tell me my daughter had AIDS until a month before she died so I didn't know what was going on. I want to know all about AIDS because it might strike another member of my family, and I want to be prepared for it this time. I don't want to be in the dark again." O

Self Taught/Self Represented
Homeless Women and AIDS

New York City HIV/AIDS Hotline provides anonymous testing, counseling, and referrals: 718-495-8444. Statewide number: 1-800-872-7777. All services are free. O The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) gives free medication for the treatment of HIV infection and AIDS: 1-800-542-2437. O Women & AIDS Resource Network (WARN) provides counseling, support, and referrals for HIV+ women: 718-596-6007. O Sister-to-Sister Project provides special counseling and support services for black women: 718-596-6000.

Women's Health Education Project, after which Carson and Keppel and resident artists designed, using text supplied by residents, a poster entitled *Self Taught/Self Represented*. Visual AIDS donated funds to reproduce the poster, and several thousand copies were supplied to shelters and social service organizations throughout the city. In other cases, collaboration means making separate art pieces that, seen together, become something quite different: children in the after-school program sculpted self-portraits that, seen individually, are interesting and fun; displayed together, all in a row, the little clay heads take on weight, a kind of historical grace and power.

Under the A&HC's generous wingspan, collaboration is both organized and informal. The Résumé Project, conceived as an art work to be included in an exhibition of A&HC art works at the Henry Street Settlement, embodies both characteristics: members of the Women's Action Coalition (WAC) visited the Lexington Avenue Shelter on a



Something Lost, Something Gained (detail), 1993.
 Representative of nomadic housing, a symbol of shelter that presents no clear boundaries between inside and outside, this twelve-foot-high tent comprises approximately 150 ten-inch squares contributed by Artist and Homeless Collaborative resident and visiting artists, as well as by artists all over the country. Organized by Robin Tewes, the tent was installed at the Henry Street Settlement's *On the Way Home* exhibition, which also featured art work by resident artists and résumés from the Résumé Project.

weekly basis to create professional résumés for residents, and the résumés were exhibited under the title *Positions Wanted/Opportunities Needed*. Subsequently, individual WAC members, having seen the résumés, hired some of the women or recommended them for jobs, and two Park Avenue residents were hired to work as hosts/security guards at WAC meetings. Other WAC members organized a business-apparel clothing drive, GED tutoring, and computer training. Whatever the form, the emphasis is on the kind of collaboration that allows participating shelter residents, who suffer from, but rarely have the opportunity to enter public discourse on, homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence, rape, racism, sexism, etc., to speak for themselves. If we think we know, for example, that people who live in shelters are lazy, nonproductive, uneducated, or completely disadvantaged, we will be surprised by the employment and educational histories some of the résumés reveal.

That the majority of shelter residents are neither trained nor define themselves as artists raises a number of questions, not the least of which is whether the A&HC's efforts are less art making than they are social work or art therapy. Certainly, if making art is what drives the A&HC, the derived benefits may be considered therapeutic. As Linda Burnham points out in a 1987 essay about "the interaction between 'non-artists' and art-world refugees" in several programs not unlike the A&HC, "they are making *art*, not therapy (though the results are undeniably therapeutic)."¹⁸ Arlette Petty, a former Park Avenue resident who now serves on the A&HC board of directors and works as an

At the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, children from the Regent Family Residence make chalk erasure drawings in a workshop led by visiting artist Gary Simmons, in conjunction with his exhibition *The Garden of Hate*.





Julie D'Amario, Michelle Marozcik, Bessie B., Yvonne D., Jackie D., Alice D., Lydia E., Tony F., Vassie J., Charlene L., Georgina M., Florence M., Louise R., Theo F., Merriann S., Maryann S., and Lillian W., *Park Avenue Shelter Portraits*, 1992. Hand-painted copper plate etchings, 9 1/2" x 7".

aide in the A&HC/Whitney Museum at Philip Morris After School Art Education Program, recalls that as she became more involved with the art projects:

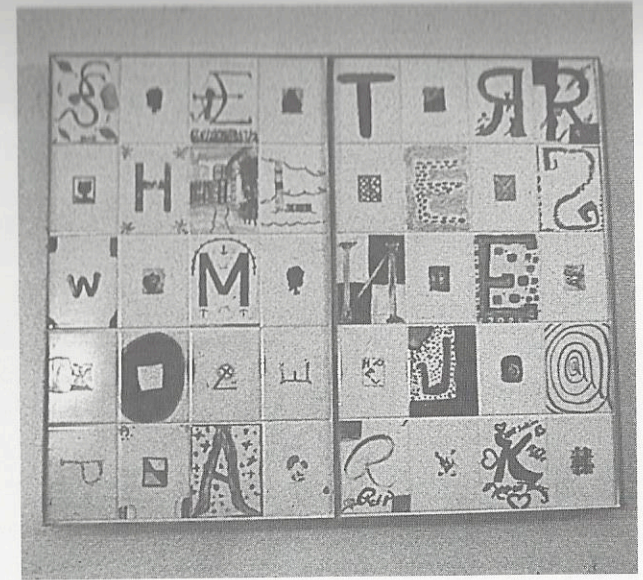
I started to express myself more freely; [working with the A&HC] just opened me up. I had become very lethargic—a shelter can do that because you're in crisis. It's a very draining experience, so it's easy to just go to bed; a lot of that is depression.

Working with the A&HC, Petty told me, may have provided her with the drive to get herself out of the shelter system and into public housing, a labyrinthine task that requires great patience, persistence, and a well-developed sense of the absurd.¹⁹ "My self-esteem was heightened. And even though I had known what to do all the time, I didn't have the energy to do it. So they motivated me and probably didn't realize it."

After losing her home to a fire, Jackie McLean turned to the shelter system as a last resort. As she describes it:

I was very, very upset. I felt like I was at the bottom of the barrel. When you first go into a place like that not knowing what to expect, it's like a horror show. All I wanted to do was turn around and run. [McLean admits she was] feeling a little sorry for myself. But some people saw I was in a little shell and they told me about the art projects. Meeting Hope, then Frank and Patrick [Frank Moore and Patrick O'Connell from Visual

Lise Prowse and Curt Beshel, Bernadette, Judy O., Yvonne D., Jackie D., Winnie, Jenny, Gerti C., Bessie, Barbara, Doris, Elizabeth, and Vassie, *Park Avenue Shelter for Homeless Women*, 1991. Ceramic tile glazed and mounted on wood. Since many nearby buildings are marked by plaques, visiting artists Prowse and Beshel suggested marking the shelter. Not wanting to see the words "Homeless Shelter" every day, resident artists recommended taking an abstract approach.



AIDS] was a godsend. The Ribbon Project gave me something to do, something to look forward to, and made me feel a little bit independent. It changed everything.

McLean's expectedly brief stay stretched into fourteen months as she tried to make her way through the system and into permanent housing. When at last the city offered to place her in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel, McLean was horrified: "I didn't come from that, and I didn't see why I should go there." Instead, she eventually found her own apartment, which she shares with a friend she made at Park Avenue. With the shelter behind her, McLean nevertheless stays in touch with Sandrow and the A&HC. "Not only did [working with the A&HC and Visual AIDS] help get me back to being me, but I learned a lot of things, and it helped me communicate. I never thought I could speak in public, but Hope asked me to speak a few times, and I found I enjoyed it and was pretty good at it."

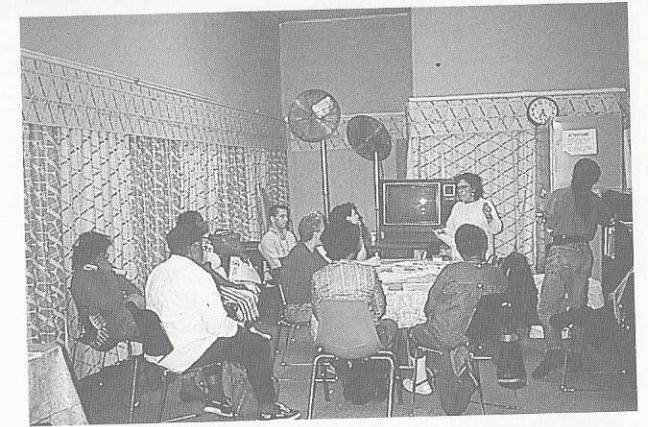
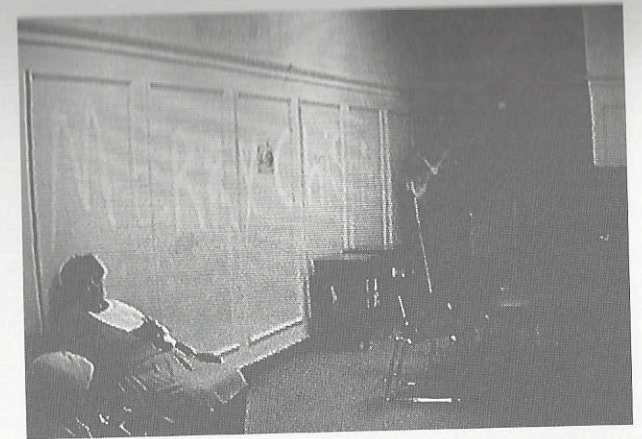
Maria left her Missouri home when, after rearing five children and having been deserted by her husband, she was called to "do the work of the Lord." She'd been in and out of the Park Avenue Shelter since arriving in New York in 1989 and, although service to the Lord is her first priority, Maria now draws and paints regularly, allowing that making art "makes you feel better about yourself, especially when you

have people that put you down and act like you can't do anything. I spent my life raising a family, but I knew there was things I could do, given a chance." Gerti C., like Petty a former Park Avenue resident and an After School program teacher's aide, says she was always writing, sketching, and painting, but was too shy to share her work. Making art with the A&HC seems to have given her the confidence to "come out" as an artist, and it is that state, and not homelessness, that is elemental; today the once "shy artist" (as Gerti describes her former self) says, "I hear people say they can't become an artist. I'm not here to *become* an artist. I was made that way. I was born that way. If I die, I'll come back as an artist."

"I'm not here to become an artist. I was made that way."

Assessing on artistic merit alone the results of collaborations between so many artists with varying degrees of experience and natural ability may prove difficult; it seems likely that one's response to any particular art work will be colored by an awareness of the merits of its message and the process of its actual creation. But assessing the works' artistic quality and considering their social value need not be mutually exclusive, nor should such considerations be confused with an understanding of the works as art objects. If there is any difficulty in accepting the works as legitimate art, the problem may lie less in the pieces' provenance or quality than in traditional methods of critical evaluation. If we look beyond traditional (and traditionally polarized) understandings of both art and social action, as Allison Gamble points out in her examination of Sculpture Chicago's 1992–93 series, *Culture in Action*, we see that "community-based collaborative works . . . are investigations into the space between private experience and public life."²⁰ Such an understanding becomes particularly interesting in relationship to shelters, where one's private life is all too public: at the Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue shelters, anywhere from a handful to sometimes more than a hundred women may sleep in a single room (in Lexington Avenue's approximately fifty-bed "drill room," the lights are left on at night; the reason, depending on who is explaining, is to enhance security and ensure fire safety, *or* to discourage sexual activity and to create as dehumanizing an atmosphere as possible). There are no private bathrooms (at some shelters, residents

Pepon Osorio, Brelzie D., Diane D., Gerti C., and Maxine L., *Homeless Blues*, 1990. Mixed media. The first picture, taken in September 1990, shows a holiday greeting written into the dirt on the wall of the TV room at the Park Avenue Shelter. The second view shows the same room two months later, after its transformation. The installation takes its name from a poem by Diane D., which is painted along the valance. When parts of the shelter facility were repainted some two years later, the installation was removed and never restored. The room is now beige.



have had to negotiate with staff for "amenities" like toilet paper). At Lexington Avenue, a male guard sits in full view of a room in which women gather to iron clothes, set their hair, etc. The residents are dependent on public funding for food, housing, and needed services; in order to receive those services, it may be necessary to prove "worthiness" by discussing entirely personal details of one's life and circumstances with strangers. Quite simply, entering the shelter system means relinquishing all rights to privacy.

And yet, living with so many people in such circumstances can be terribly isolating. Recall Arlette Petty's words about being depressed and in crisis, then imagine being sent to live in an armory or old school to share bed and bath with dozens of strangers, to be watched over by guards, to constantly have to justify your right to receive food and shelter, indeed, your very right to exist. Imagine the nights, as

described by Maria: "Most of the ladies are in their right state of mind, but a few of them aren't, and some of them in the middle of the night will scream and holler." Maria also describes the days: "I feel sorry about some of the people in the shelters. They're not given much of a chance. They're branded and a lot of times ridiculed and treated very badly by some of the staff." Maria tells me several times that most of the staff members and guards are very nice, "but some are not kind at all." And though Maria, who doesn't know me well, leaves herself out of the discussion, it seems clear—and Sandrow later confirms—that she has not escaped mistreatment.

Making art may or may not be the best way of addressing the problems of shelter residents, but for many it may be the only method available, one that allows them to make contact without having to be outgoing, to speak English or read or write well, to reveal anything they want kept private. Women are among the hardest hit yet least visible victims of poverty and numerous other social ills, all of which may pave the road to homelessness: domestic violence, age discrimination, insufficient family planning services, racism, homophobia, insufficient addiction-recovery services, etc. Being an undocumented domestic worker whose employer dies (leaving no references or benefits), suffering illness or injury (and being too poor to pay for housing *and* medical care), being unable or unwilling to turn to abusive family members for help in a time of need—these are situations that can lead to homelessness. The women may desperately need permanent housing, training, jobs, and social programs, but the A&HC responds to equally vital, if perhaps less tangible, needs, and, as noted earlier, this may play a significant role in the eventual acquisition of the more tangible needs. Theo, a former longtime Park Avenue resident, appreciates the art making as "a source of entertainment. I'm not well enough to go to parties or anything, so I have to be in all the time. This helps me a lot." The enormity of Theo's statement may not be readily apparent, but visiting artist Peter Krashes notes that although some of the women see the art making primarily as a diversion, its very process offers considerable benefits: participants gain from watching a work of art take shape as a result of their own efforts; women who didn't know one another's names work together toward a common goal; the site of the art making is infused

with the spirit of cooperation as the workshops offer the women a rare opportunity to work as a community:

The dynamics of the shelter are such that very close bonds develop, but only between two or three women. They can't make much noise, and if a group develops, a guard wanders over to see what's going on—a group is assumed to mean a fight.

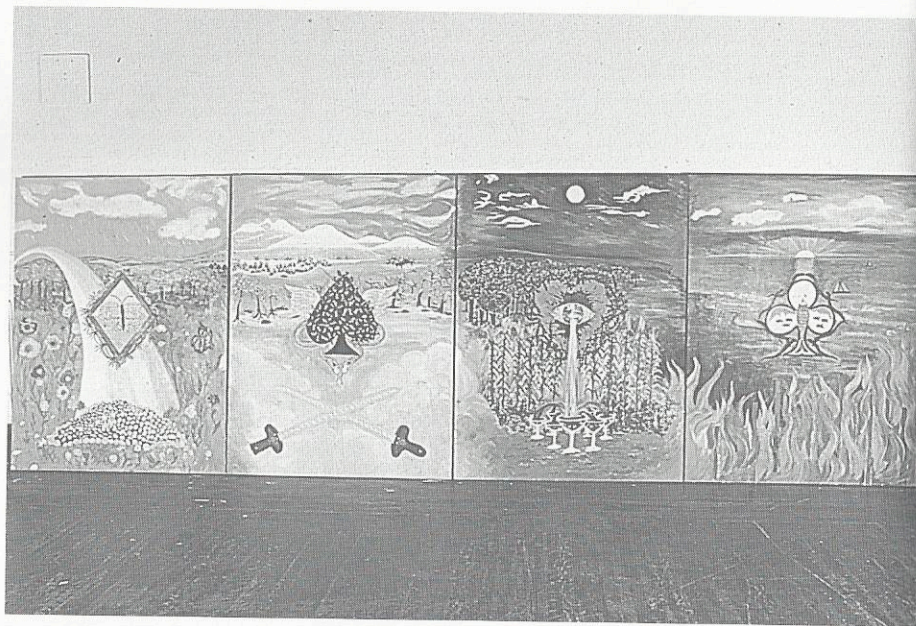
E. G. Crichton's observation about the NAMES Quilt might as easily have been made about the A&HC:

What the NAMES Project Quilt has in common with feminist, environmental, ancient, tribal, and Chilean art is a tradition of collaboration, a mixing of media, and an emphasis on process that makes the reason for the art just as important as the finished product.²¹

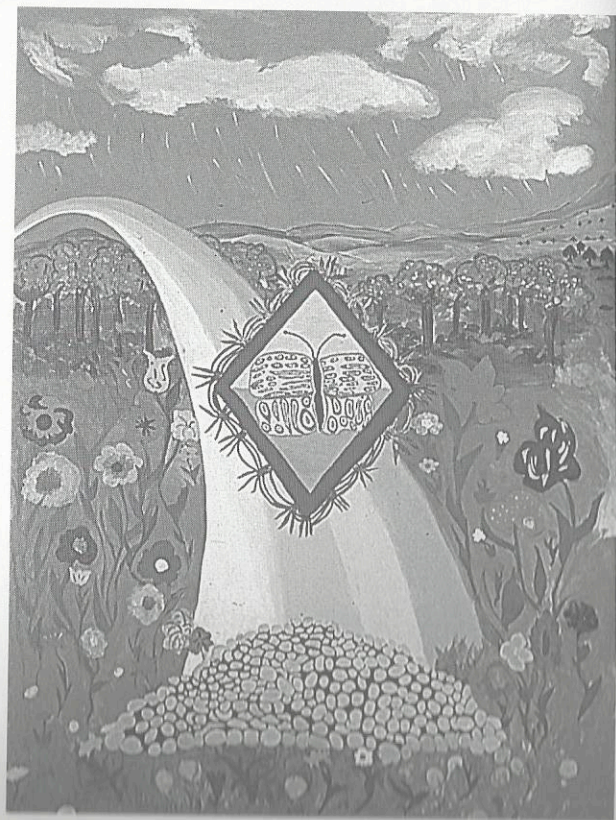
This emphasis on process is not intended to diminish the significance of the finished product, which, when displayed in the shelter, can improve the dismal surroundings and be a source of pride for the residents who made it—as well, sometimes, as those who merely watched as the work was created: a spirited debate about placement erupted among numerous Park Avenue residents when it came time to hang *The Four Seasons*, which had been painted by one visiting artist and five resident artists. Because the other women had watched the painting come to life, Sandrow recalls, "they all considered it their painting." By that she means each one, individually.

In fact, *unlike* the NAMES Quilt, of which Crichton says, "The individual artist's identity is less important than the purpose of the art in the life of a community or people,"²² here, for women living without their homes, jobs, families, personal possessions, the right to food preferences, etc., individual identity is paramount. Well aware of the stigma attached to living in a shelter, fearful of bringing shame to themselves and their families, most of the resident artists sign their work using only first names and last initials; nevertheless, the art projects allow each resident artist to portray herself, her life, her concerns, as she wants them portrayed.

My own experience working with Janet (not her real name)—who, the night I visited the Lexington Avenue Shelter, made art almost in spite of herself—may be instructive. The project under way (Sandrow



Keiko Bonk, Audrey J., Geraldine W., Lonzetta P., Maxine L., and Olivia S., *The Four Seasons*, 1990. Acrylic on canvas, 240" x 84" (detail right). The passing of the seasons was a subject all the women could relate to. The painting incorporates symbols from the Tarot, another common interest. The painting now hangs at the Park Avenue Shelter.

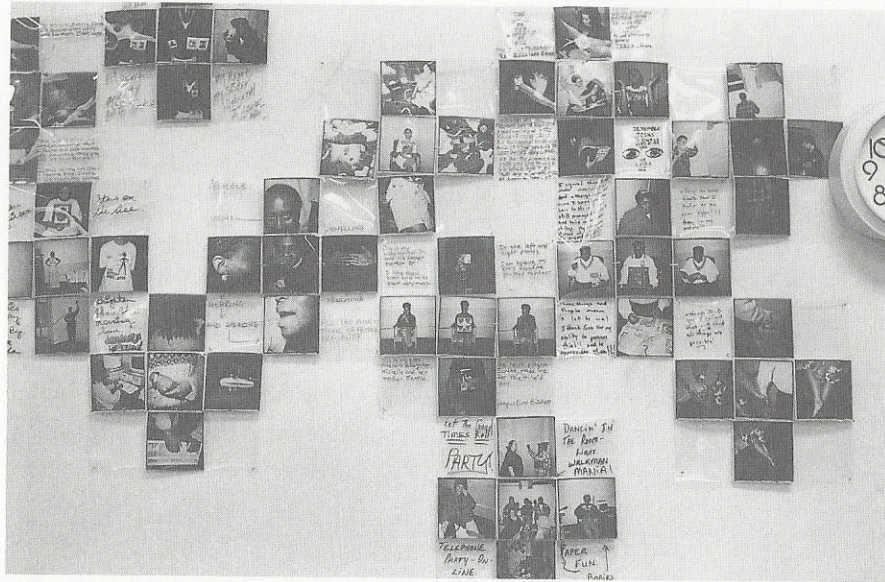


began conducting workshops at Lexington Avenue in January 1994) was the creation of a community quilt. Each resident artist, working with a volunteer, constructed a section made of five Polaroid pictures mounted on acetate sheets with handwritten text. The sections, created over a period of six months and based each week on an issue of importance to the quilt makers as women, ultimately were assembled into one large quilt. The previous week, Janet had made a section of pictures in which she appeared holding photographs of her son, her friend's child, and her son's favorite stuffed animal. This night, with female sexuality the focus, Janet insisted on changing into a borrowed black evening gown. Enthusiastic, she nevertheless seemed unable to articulate any particular concept or point of view for her section; it was clear only that she wanted to pose and have her picture taken. As directed (by Janet), I took shots of her vamping in her Vampira dress and then tried to sneak a few candid, hoping to capture the natural ebullience that inevitably burst forth the very moment *after* I released the shutter. To say that Janet was more excited about being photographed in a kick-ass sexy dress than about making art may sound patronizing, and in truth, I wondered whether this experience qualified even as the cultivation of self-expression, not to mention art. Without doubt, the project allowed Janet to express a side of herself that shelter life and poverty do everything to suppress. When we

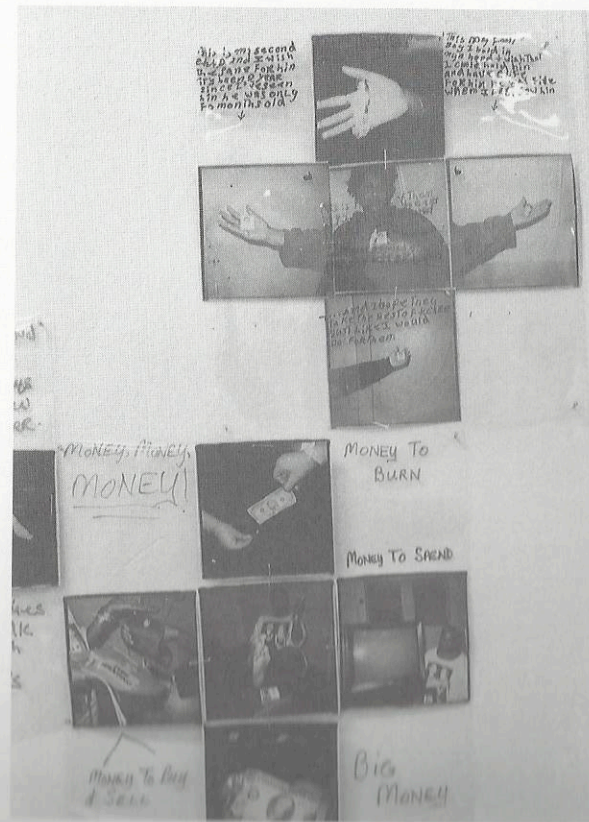
If, as I believe, all human beings are born with the ability to sing, dance, and make art, the A&HC may help reawaken what our repressive, violent world most often puts into a state of dormancy.

finished shooting, Janet, as instructed, chose five of our ten shots for the quilt, and five to keep for herself; she took her favorite and showed it to everybody in the room, saying she was going to show it to her father, who wouldn't believe his little girl could look like that. This surprised me, since Janet is obviously a grown-up, attractive woman, a self-assessment she, like so many women, apparently was unable to make without the help of bare skin and cheesecake. I found myself wondering if she—or almost any woman in

the United States, for that matter—would be able to get beyond such imitations of femininity if she had more frequent opportunities for the safe, enjoyable expression of her adult sexuality. And if Janet



Hope Sandrow and Lexington Avenue Shelter residents, *Community Quilt*, 1994. Polaroid quilt making calls on a traditional form of community art making and allows resident artists to address issues significant in their lives. Here, the quilt hangs on a wall at the Lexington Avenue Shelter.



could make art for more than two hours a week, I wondered, what might she be able to do? In the end, her arrangement of the photographs she had selected for the quilt, including a self-portrait (made by holding the camera at arm's length) captioned, "I wanted to see the inner beauty," makes a powerful statement, particularly when considered alongside her quilt section from the previous week. What Janet and the other women are saying, says Sandrow, is what's on their minds.

In the first piece, Janet chose to demonstrate that even though her son isn't with her, she's a caring, loving mother, and in the next piece, that she may have been stripped of everything, but she's a sexy, attractive woman—this is actually heroic to me. Those are identities the shelter system strips away. And the art work gave her the opportunity to reaffirm those identities and gives viewers the opportunity to see past their own stereotypes and assumptions.

If Janet's pictures express what is important to her without revealing the specific circumstances of her life—that her child is not living with her, that she is poor, that she lives in a shelter, that she does not normally have the opportunity to dress up or that the black gown does not even belong to her—some of the quilt photographs address the realities of the women's lives quite directly. The week after I met Janet, the group settled on money as the topic for the night's quilt making. Two residents collaborated on a picture in which one pretended to be a phony blind beggar. Meanwhile, across the room, Gerti (the former resident who is now an A&HC volunteer) and I worked with Veronica, who, for the most part, sat by passively, unable, uninterested, or unwilling to take an active role. As Gerti and I set up and shot a few pictures, we tried to interest Veronica, who responded to our questions largely by shrugging her shoulders and saying, "I don't know." Finally, nearing the last of our allotted ten shots, I insisted that Veronica actively participate; she had me photograph her holding a sign on which she had written, "I need money. Can somebody please tell me where can I get some?" Next to Gerti's interesting but complicated collage contrasting homelessness with the real estate market, and my shot of coins ever so artfully strewn across

a carefully arranged piece of gold velvet, the photograph of Veronica, sign in her hands, rueful expression on her face, seemed to say it all.

Are Janet and Veronica and the other participating shelter residents artists? Are their Polaroid quilts, "doll" figures, life drawings, self-portraits, posters, and etchings art? The A&HC's process and product may raise such questions, challenging participants and observers alike to move beyond the safety of neat, polarized concepts of art and nonart, artist and nonartist, of "artist" and even "homeless" as expressions of one's essential nature, as sort of Aristotelian identity marks. If, as I believe, all human beings are born with the ability to sing, dance, and make art, the A&HC may help reawaken what our repressive, violent world most often puts into a state of dormancy.

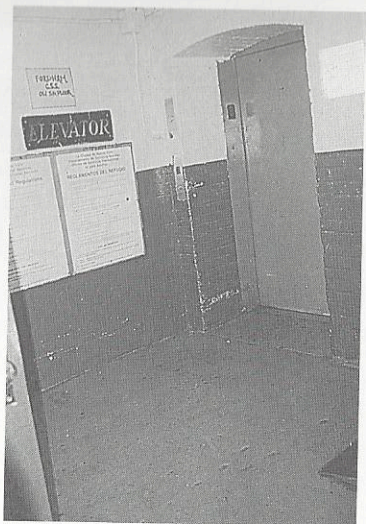
Although many resident artists have approached the workshops with the same kind of limited assumptions most people have about what constitutes art (if-you-can-draw-this-you-too-can-be-an-artist), some of the participants have surely come to think of themselves as artists. Former Park Avenue resident Maria, who as a child loved to draw (but had neither the training nor adequate supplies to develop her talent), became a dedicated attendee of life drawing workshops led by Oliver Herring and Peter Krashes. Since official A&HC visits were curtailed beginning in the summer of 1993 while the shelter underwent repairs, Maria, Oliver, Peter, and resident artist Theo have continued meeting once a week, either at the shelter or at the studio Herring and Krashes share. Maria and Theo continue doing portraiture, for which they receive small commissions; much of their earnings go right back into art supplies. Gerti, who once was too shy to show her sketches to anyone, now lives independently and not only paints as often as possible but also exhibits and sells her work. Gerti, Theo, and Maria may not be part of any particular art scene, but the bare facts indicate that they are indeed artists, and professional ones at that. In the end, quibbling about the relationship between social programs and the A&HC's art making, making categorizations based solely on a qualitative evaluation of the project's end products, even defining art and artists, all seem beside the point, for the A&HC appears to have an enriching, expansive effect on the lives of just about everyone it touches. Besides, as far as Sandrow is concerned, the

A&HC itself—which she calls, alternatively, a live art work, a theater for action, and a process piece—is the art work.

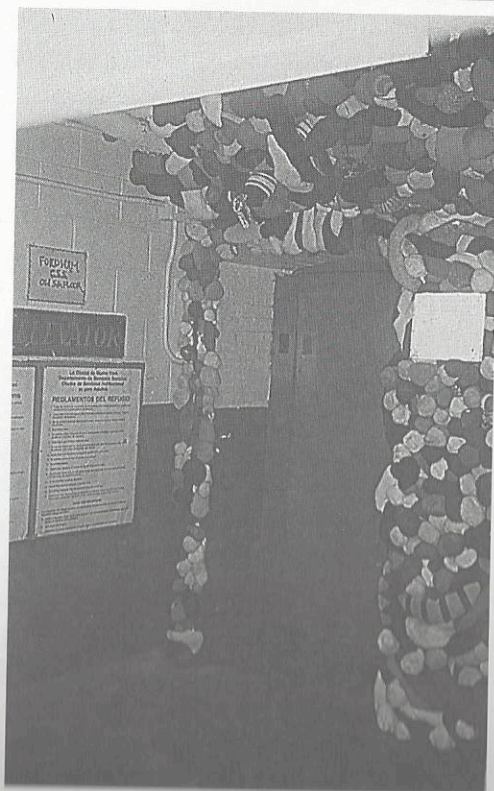
If creating "a more stimulating environment in the shelters" and "inspiring people who have lost their homes to envision a more promising future"²³ is on the agenda of Sandrow's big art project, so is closing the gap between the art world and the world of the homeless. Sandrow's ambivalent relationship with the former (which she is a part of, and which she respects but finds limiting) had as much to do with the creation of the Artist and Homeless Collaborative as her concern for people living in shelters; she actually draws a distinction between the A&HC's official goals and her own quite personal one, which is, simply, "to explore the relevancy of art to people's lives." As a "theater for action," the A&HC is about bringing people together and seeing what happens. Thus, introducing artists to life in the shelters is every bit as essential as introducing shelter residents to art; when Sandrow first was offered the opportunity to take her workshops to Park Avenue, the irony of the have-nots sharing a zip code with the haves was not lost on her, the chance to bring to the Park Avenue Shelter artists whose work might well be hanging in Park Avenue salons too rich to pass up.

For the uninitiated, shelter visits can be eye-opening. At Lexington Avenue, residents enter through a hallway filled with garbage bags, then pass through a metal detector; every time the women enter and exit the building, these are the sights that greet them. Most visitors to the Park Avenue Armory enter through that building's ornate foyer on their way to art and antiquities fairs, to benefits and balls, to the tennis courts, to dinner at the Seventh Regiment Mess, a half-timbered bad dream whose most prominent decorative feature is a row of mounted moose heads strung with Christmas lights. Bad taste notwithstanding, the building's grandiosity, its excesses, are nowhere in sight of the shelter residents, who enter through a separate metal-detector-equipped, garbage-filled, basement-level entrance and are allowed only on the third and fifth floors.

Sandrow is the first to say that everything she has learned in seven years of making art in shelters feeds right back into the work she does in her studio. If her visual style remains oblique, her vocabulary



Vince Gargiulo, Aida, Doris, Geraldine, Hazel D., Jackie D., Jenny, Judy O., Lucille L., Vassie, and Yvonne D., *Soft Entry*, 1991. "Recycled" socks woven into a steel facade. Most visitors to the Park Avenue Armory enter through its grand foyer; shelter residents must use this basement-level entrance (edge of metal detector can be seen at left of first view) and, in fact, are threatened with transfer to another facility if they do not comply. Some shelter personnel thought socks shouldn't be wasted on art. Although the socks had been treated with fire retardant, the installation was said to be a hazard and eventually was removed.



Judith Shea and Park Avenue Shelter residents, 1993. Mixed media. What was originally conceived as an opportunity to make prototypes of dolls that could be reproduced and sold to benefit resident artists, this figure-making workshop stretched into a six-month-long collaboration. Resident artists, approaching the work with great freedom and creativity, made something extraordinary, and the project took on a life of its own.



largely symbolic, she has chosen nevertheless to tackle her issues more directly. Her current work, a trilogy (begun in 1991) in which images on photographic paper are peeled from their backing in thin layers and then reconstructed, tacked onto boards, holds suggestions of violence and tearing apart, as well as of erasure and embrace. For the first series, *Memories Untitled (Skinned)*, Sandrow drew directly on life experiences shelter residents shared during art workshops, while the second part, *Spaces*, echoes the Christian religious imagery many residents hold dear.

Working in shelters, says Oliver Herring, "really changed my work." For his current conceptual projects, Herring roams the city collecting plastic bags and other discards, which he cleans and turns into useful objects, "the way a homeless person might do." He and Peter Krashes value not only their work but also their friendship with Theo and Maria and have, Krashes notes, taken a certain sense of permission from the women: "I've learned that you don't have to question so much what you do, that doing art has a lot to do with self-esteem and self-recognition. . . . It's been a big breakthrough to learn to allow myself to do what I want." Most important, says Krashes, is the opportunity to develop friendships "with people we wouldn't ordinarily know—and to find out we have so much in common." Similarly,



Hope Sandrow (center) with resident artists Patricia and Gabriella at the Lexington Avenue Shelter art workshop.

Judith Shea, while less certain about whose work influenced whom, found the women's sheer *willingness*, despite their lack of technical training, "very freeing. . . . The power of what I saw was inspiring to me." Shea, who has been teaching for years, readily acknowledges that although she tried to go into the shelter without a lot of assumptions, "whatever assumptions I did secretly have were just twisted around."

But while the A&HC has succeeded in bringing together professional artists and shelter residents (Sandrow estimates that to date some one hundred or so professional artists and perhaps 2,000 shelter residents have worked with the A&HC), its momentum has slowed in recent months. In mid-1993, the board of directors elected—temporarily, perhaps—to stop sponsoring projects not related to art. Ironically, if that decision was reflective of the board's desire to keep the focus on art making, the A&HC's art workshops ground to a near halt when, in August 1993, the Park Avenue Shelter population was cut by well over half so that building repairs could be made. Scheduled projects were put on hold and, told several times that the situation would revert to normal "next week," Sandrow, Krashes, and Herring waited in a kind of limbo. In the meantime, Herring and Krashes, as noted earlier, continued working with resident artists Maria and Theo (both of whom moved into a new SRO residence in the summer of 1994), and Sandrow, tired of waiting, began holding art workshops at the Lexington Avenue Shelter. The presence of a new city administration since January 1994 and the subsequent reordering of city agencies and impending budget cuts, along with the imminent privat-

ization of some city shelters, including Lexington Avenue, have made it difficult to make definite plans, and so to write grant proposals, further impeding the organization's progress. "We're taking it step by step," says Sandrow. "Like shelter residents, we deal with uncertainty. You have to be very fluid when dealing with the city."

But identifying the exact source of the A&HC's troubles isn't easy: as in Sandrow's photographs, truth is many-sided, reality multilayered. While city and shelter bureaucracy have *never* made it easy for the A&HC to do what it does, internal conflicts have contributed to the general—and, in all likelihood, temporary—slowdown of A&HC activities. Certainly, Sandrow wanted her project to grow in particular ways: she wanted to bring in other artists, she wanted those artists to be paid, and she wanted to reach as many shelter residents as she could. (The organization would also like to train and pay shelter residents to lead workshops and is attempting to raise money for this purpose.) But as Sandrow puts it, the project "snowballed—all sorts of people wanted to get involved and follow their own agendas. I thought it was interesting to learn how to orchestrate all these people and at the same time to learn how to compromise." The failure of the organization to hire a full-time director (they didn't have the funds to do so) has meant that Sandrow has had to function as an executive director, a responsibility she does not want and has accepted only in order to keep the A&HC functioning. To avoid being consumed by her directorial role, Sandrow realized, she had to "let go."

Letting go meant, among other things, allowing the board to set its own agenda. And therein lay the dilemma. By 1993, the A&HC had grown too big to qualify for small, grassroots-type funding, yet had a budget too small for it to qualify for many larger grants. Caught in the crunch, the board president (who has since stepped down) favored a more ambitious budget, a decision several other board members considered inappropriate. Sandrow takes pains to clarify the difference between her own plans for the A&HC and those of the board of directors, some of whose members, though compassionate, might not fully grasp the immediacy of shelter residents' needs.

A young organization tries to bring together three disparate worlds to make art.

Happily, at the time of this writing (late July 1994), the situation seems to have taken a turn for the better. The search for a full-time director to manage day-to-day operations is at last under way, seed money has been secured, and Sandrow has been elected board president, a position that should allow her to steer the A&HC's overall and, most important, artistic course. There are indications that with the imminent return of temporarily relocated residents, art workshops may be resumed at the Park Avenue Shelter. (Unfortunately, in July 1993 the Giuliani administration's reorganization of city agencies resulted in termination of the Lexington Avenue Shelter's Survival Skills program, which had sponsored the A&HC there.) The creation of seven collaborative site-specific art works commissioned for the Food and Hunger Hotline's One City Café means a new collaboration between resident and visiting artists will soon be under way, and Sandrow has been in conversation with a member of the city's Human Resources Administration about expanding the A&HC's role within the shelter system.²⁴ Further, Sandrow believes the A&HC once again will be able to sponsor (although it will not provide funds for) the kind of nonart projects that were suspended.

In the end, the difficulties the A&HC has experienced may have been little more than the growing pains of a relatively young organization, one that tries to bring together three disparate worlds—the art scene, city government, and the world of the dispossessed—to do something really rather modest: make art. Making art, it's true, doesn't put food in the mouths of the women and children who live in the Park Avenue Shelter, at Lexington Avenue, at the Regent Family Residence. It doesn't give them keys to their own apartments, doesn't pay for medical care, doesn't provide shoes and coats, scarves and mittens. And yet, perhaps Robert Smithson was on to something: perhaps art need not be "considered as merely a luxury." For Arlette Petty, the Artist and Homeless Collaborative "gave me hope. Hope for the future . . . and also I was lucky enough to meet Hope Sandrow. So it turned out to be the most positive thing that happened to me in the shelter. It's sort of like a double hope."

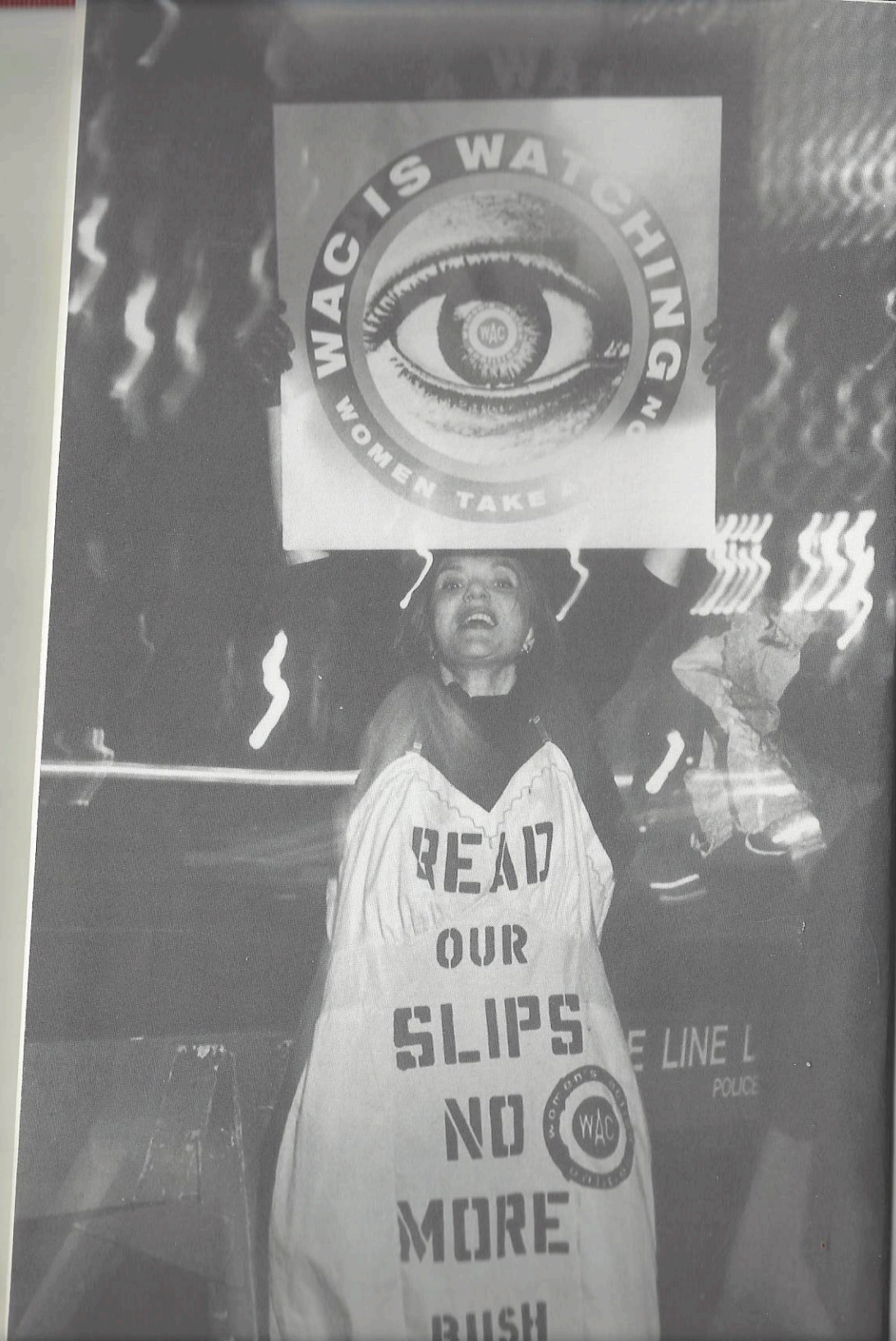
Peggy Diggs:

Private Acts and Public Art

Public and Private

In 1930, the French architect Le Corbusier completed a design for an apartment and adjoining roof garden in Paris for Charles Beistegui, an art collector who had amassed an enormous collection of Surrealist art. Although the project no longer exists, black-and-white photographs reveal the outdoor space as a disquieting, incongruous environment, even if representative of the collector's psychological and aesthetic predilections. As an architectural link between the domestic interior and the modern city, the roof garden presaged, in its blurring of private and public realms, the spatial ambiguity that has become increasingly evident in the late twentieth century.

In one particularly poignant image of the Le Corbusier design, the roof garden is vacant except for an ersatz hearth and two empty chairs. The surrounding walls are a discomfiting height, too tall to offer an easy, unobstructed gaze toward the city beyond, but too low to eliminate its unruly presence entirely. In an uncanny but no doubt premeditated juxtaposition, the top portion of Paris's Arc de Triomphe peeks over the wall, establishing an indelible correspondence between its powerful public iconography and the roof garden's theatrical fireplace. In fact, the angle of vision is such that the scale of these two archetypal forms is not only compatible, but nearly interchangeable. The Arc de Triomphe, that resplendent emblem of the ceremonial, civic life of the city, establishes a relationship with the hearth, the warm, evocative sign of the domestic environment. Like a single image that slides in and out of focus, these polarized yet typologically related symbols of public and domestic life confirm a complicitous relationship that recalls a historical legacy only to signify a moment of radical change.



But is it

Art
?

**The Spirit of
Art as Activism**

Edited by

Nina Felshin

Bay Press

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For my parents, Seon and Dorothy Felshin