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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

BY

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MAY 14 1991

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Ed, Phil, Judd, and Bob for all their advice and encouragement. I would also like to thank Peter and Joanne for making me feel so much at home. I give special thanks to Hope and to my parents, for standing behind my endeavors and putting up with my mild schizophrenic fits.

INTRODUCTION

My time spent here at RIT has taken me many places within the understanding of art. I can honestly say the time was well worth it. I can't help but realize that an education is a wonderful thing and that having to pay for it is excluding many who could use it. I had no expectations coming to graduate school, which might have been a good thing. My main concern was to prepare myself for a life without school, where I could guide myself on my own thoughts and feel secure doing so.

The work I've done here has gone from one end of the spectrum to the other, and yet I still find an incompleteness; not in the sense of my understanding on art, which seems to have leveled out, but in the realm of possibilities. There were many times in the past two years, when I searched for consistencies in the progression of my art, and found none. And other times when I was searching for inconsistencies, I could only find the consistent. What I've come to realize through all of this, is that one cannot expect anything other than the act of making art. This will be a given, everything else is the unknown. The real challenge is not making the art, because that comes easy, but rather the discovery of ideas that seem to tell a little more about the truth of things, even when the truth might be a lie.

The writing that follows is a brief history of my development in imagery and artistic concerns while at RIT. I have made an attempt to give the viewer a summary of what transpired as I know it. My aim was not to prove a new found art or to reaffirm a certain way of thinking. It was only to record an event that happened, so that someone might read it and possibly find some sort of correlation between my way of thinking and theirs.

BACKGROUND

Before I expound on my artistic endeavor here at RIT I should first give the reader a brief history of myself. I was one of triplets born into a large family. Eight kids to be exact. The fact that I grew up in a large family has no doubt affected the way I perceive the world. As far back as I can remember I've always thought in terms of the big picture. Most of my childhood and teen-age years were spent growing up on a farm outside of Watkins Glen, a small town at the base of Seneca Lake. I was not much different than any other kid growing up in a small town, other than being a triplet I was basically the same. In school my interests varied. The classes I enjoyed the most were art and industrial arts. I suppose I'm like most artists in this respect, and don't find it the least bit unusual. In high school I took a studio art class and a photography class. That was the extent of my formal art training.

In the fall of 82 after I graduated from high school I entered a community college outside of Ithaca. There I spent a year as a math and science major and took another art class. I enjoyed the art class but found my major uninteresting, so I decided to take some time off to discover my professional interests. The time off amounted to a year, and my professional interests led me to a pig farm. Needless to say it didn't take me long to realize that I wanted to go back to college again. This time I was going to major in something that interested me which happened to be art. I must make a note that this was the first major intuitive response that I would act on of which many more were to follow.

I applied to several SUNY schools and got accepted to most of them. I chose Oswego which in hind sight turned out to be a good choice. At Oswego you didn't need a portfolio review to get in. This worked out well because I had none to show. A lack of competitiveness in an art program might be seen negatively. For someone like myself, with very little art training, it was the right approach for discovering the arts. In this respect, a program like Oswego's is perfect for an introduction into the arts. It doesn't expect to turn out top notch artists, but it will, somewhere along the way, pick up a few people who will commit themselves to the process of making art. At Oswego I tested the range of art, or what they could offer, from graphic design to sculpture. In the middle or there about, I chose painting. So from my junior year on until I graduated I took painting.

The nice thing about Painting is that it seemed to cover a vast amount of territory in a relatively short period of time. At first I painted the figure in an expressive yet realistic manner usually within an ambiguous background. This kind of painting lasted for about a year. During this time I became quite confident of my drawing capabilities, not only with the figure but with objects in general. It wasn't until my senior year that I decided to incorporate some objects into the painting along with the figure. This was an exciting move, because it heightened the illusionistic space of the picture plane and I was pleased with the results.

At first I was indiscriminate about my choice of objects, but progressively this became less so. As my interest for the objects grew, my interests in the figure lessened. I can look back and say that the transition from figure to object was a critical moment, because it was the first time I ever challenged the content of my work. Eventually I lost interests in the figure altogether and concentrated only on the object. From that time on, up until I graduated, I painted the stilllife. During my completion at Oswego I had many doubts concerning my life as an artist after undergraduate school. These led me to realize that my education was incomplete, and that graduate school would be the logical step in continuing it.

FROM THE STILLIFE TO THE NARRATIVE

I kicked off my first quarter at RIT with a stillife. It was a stillife composed of a number of objects set on a table in front of a window. The window had a view that looked out into the horizon and on to the city of Rochester. Looking back, it was a significant painting because it represented my introduction into a new territory both physically and mentally. The components of the stillife were banal objects and had no connection with eachother other than their banality. The space they inhabited was my studio. The implied space behind the stillife was Rochester. Metaphorically the painting represented my arrival into Rochester and a loss of identity through that process. This would be the first time a painting of mine would operate as a personal narrative by way of a metaphor.

The paintings that continued became increasingly personal, and represented a search for an imagery that I could some how connect with while in an unfamiliar setting. Eventually I stumbled upon a series of paintings that incorporated the use of a woodsman. The image of the woodsman related directly to my growing up in the country, and more specifically to my father. The woodsman represented a source of security and was something for me to focus on in a time of instability.

The first woodsman painting reaffirmed my knowledge of the familiar. It was an image of a woodsman splitting wood in a familiar territory. A territory which I knew really well and in which I grew up. But as the series progressed the image of the woodsman, and the territory he occupied became more and more unfamiliar. Soon the unfamiliar became an additive element that progressed with the series, done intentionally to defamiliarizing myself with the familiar. It is clear now, that the woodsman represented a vehicle for getting at an imagery that was much more personal and narrative in nature. In hindsight, my progression from the still life to the personal narrative appears to have correlated with my familiarity with Rochester. As I became more familiar with the city , my willingness to investigate alternative types of imagery grew.

PHILIP GUSTON

Not long before the woodsman series occurred I was doing some reading on the painter Philip Guston. I'm sure the reading on Guston sparked the woodsman series into being. Reading about his life and work helped me through that series and on to the next. Guston is probably best known as one of the leading abstract expressionist of the fifties, but his truly major accomplishment, at least for myself, was his diversity as a painter.

I was first introduced to Guston as an undergraduate. An instructor had brought his name up during a critique of my work. Somehow he related Guston to what I was doing. I'm not sure why or even how. The second time I was introduced to Guston was in 1987, at the Museum of Modern Art. There was an exhibit of his early work from the thirties and forties and some abstract line drawings from the fifties and sixties. At the time I didn't know who's work it was. I do remember though, being intrigued by the work but not having a strong opinion either way. It wasn't until I came to RIT that I realized who this man was and what he meant to me.

Guston as a painter was willing to take risk and this is what I admire most about the man. There were three major stylistic changes in Guston's career as a painter. Each shift occurred at the peak of acclaim, and each was met with disapproval by the critics. Guston discovered that being comfortable was not part of growing as an artist. He realized the artist would have to learn to trust himself, and knew it was through that trust that the artist could discover his identity. Guston came to this realization because it was something he himself had done. By trusting his own actions he was able to develop a personal vocabulary that would eventually help him come to terms with his own existence as a human being.

Much of what Guston knew took years to discover, and one cannot expect the trust in one's self to come easy. I know that, for myself, the trust is difficult to come by and that by being somewhat self-conscious it is gained. By studying artists like Guston one can learn many things. The advantage being it won't take me a lifetime as it did Guston. At the very least Guston is proof that art is not the product of a process, but rather the process itself. Knowing this has given me hope for my own artistic development. Philip Guston died in the summer of 1980 at the age of sixty-six. I regret never having the opportunity to meet the man.

WOODSMEN CHOP TREES

It wasn't long after the woodsman series before a new series of paintings came along, but in between time a number of paintings transpired, all of which have either been destroyed or painted over. These particular paintings also dealt with the woodsman but in a different manner than the earlier ones. My focus shifted from the woodsman within a territory to the action of the woodsman. To put it simply, my painting shifted gear from a narrative mode to a psychological mode.

The woodsman cutting wood implied an act of violence or destruction, and this intrigued me. So I pursued the persona of the woodsman in a number of paintings. I painted him in many different positions usually with an axe and in the act of chopping. Sometimes he was by himself, and other times with other woodsmen. I also had him cutting wood in bizarre places. Some of these places would be defined and others would remain ambiguous. But as the paintings evolved the setting became more specific, and the woodsman less violent. Eventually I came up with an image of a woodsman in a grove of trees. The trees were simplified forms with limbs cut short and looked much like logs ready to be milled. They were placed within a white background and a few of the trees were painted with a shadow. The shadows vaguely implied a three-dimensional space. The grove of trees made me think of a solidarity, and with that thought the woodsman looked out of place. So I took him out leaving only the trees. This would mark the end of the woodsman series.

Philip Guston spoke of the muse in his paintings, the woodsman must have been the muse in mine. It must have been through the woodsman and all that I knew of him, that I was able to find an image of special importance to me. That image being the tree. I'm partly aware of the tree's history as a symbol, and don't find my interest in it the least bit unusual. I do though, find my interest in it worth consideration. The tree, as I have come to understand it, symbolizes strength and integrity. It is a thing that has endured the test of time and will continue to do so. Seeing the tree in this way has made me think of it as a constant within the context of living. The woodsman was the vehicle for getting at the tree and it was only logical that the tree would be the starting point for my next series of paintings.

FROM TREES TO LOGS

By the time I reached the first tree painting, I was much more comfortable with my use of a personal imagery. The tree image felt right to me and I was much more confident using it than I was the woodsman. My manipulation of the tree form was uninhibited and quite natural, and I attribute this to my understanding of the tree. Earlier I said the tree symbolized strength and integrity, and therefore made me think of it as a constant within the context of living. By acting as a constant it could easily be transformed into a universal sign, therefore insuring its status as a symbol. With this as my understanding I was able to manipulate the tree with little fear of damaging its integrity.

The first couple of tree paintings were handled cautiously and represented a personal familiarization with the tree image. The tree image consisted of a truncated like form bearing a small number of severed limbs with each severe showing a growth ring pattern. The average size of these paintings was around 6'x8'. I found the larger size helpful in relating to the tree image. My palette was limited to five colors: white, yellow-ochre, red, green, and black. Intuitively, these colors seemed to be right for this particular imagery. The limited size of the palette was an important factor, in that it narrowed the field of aesthetic choices significantly and left more room for the development of the imagery. As the paintings developed my response to the imagery grew greater, and the images became increasingly minimal.

Shortly after I started this series a new element was introduced along with the tree form. The new element consisted of several types of hardware such as spikes, angle brackets, chains and metal loops. All were seen as fastening devices and were used as such. My interest in the use of this hardware related to my concerns with restraint and repression. This was no doubt brought upon by my involvement with student issues regarding administrative policies which occurred around the same time as this series. The imagery was definitely operating in a metaphorical manner. All of the tree forms in the paintings (usually I worked with groups of two or three), were in some way fastened down with the hardware.

I found this series of paintings successful, mainly because it incorporated a minimal amount of visual information and therefore forced the viewer to respond on a conceptual level of understanding. This series was also successful because it introduced a new approach to art for me which would operate within the conceptual as well as the visual. It was through the tree image that I was able to realize a conceptual application in my art. Because of this, the tree has become more meaningful for me as a symbol of strength and lasting integrity.

THE MONOPRINT

Monoprinting has come to be one of my favorite printing processes. This is due to its expedient nature. It is a process that requires little technique and mistakes can easily be corrected. I find the process useful in developing ideas that might not find their way to the canvas, mainly because the process inhibits a precious attitude towards the work. With the monoprint I am more likely to take risk, more so than in painting.

Much of my use for the monoprint has been to visualize ideas that have not been completely formulated. In this way the monoprinting process serves as a vehicle in developing a concept or an idea. The monoprint is most useful during transition periods within my work. The artist Dennis Openheim uses the term "stewing around" when he is in a state of transition. In my case, it is the monoprinting process that I use to stew around with.

I found monoprinting helpful during the tree series. It was then that I came up with an image of a log in my monoprints. The log image was a simplified line drawing of a piece of wood that had been split and which represented a chunk of fire wood. I used the log in a number of monoprints combining it with other logs and some times building forms out of log combinations. The log operated much like a Leggo building block in that it was one of several blocks that could give shape to a form.

The significance of the log is that it represented a stable structure both as an association and as a physical form. As an association it operated very much like the woodsman, and related directly to my growing up in the country where we used wood to heat the house. In this respect the log represents warmth and therefore a sense of security. As a physical form it is shaped like a triangle with two ends and three sides. The stable structure represented here is the triangle. The triangle is considered the strongest structure in the universe because it cannot collapse upon itself, unlike a square or rectangle. Ultimately the log functions as a symbol, much in the same way and meaning as the tree form.

I find as I reflect upon the monoprinting process, that there is a pattern which occurs during the development process of an imagery. In most cases the imagery in the monoprint precedes the imagery in the painting. As a result the monoprint acts as a testing ground for an imagery that might otherwise be overlooked, and therefore never find its way to the canvas, or for that matter to any other art form.

LOGGING IT

The tree series carried me right through into the summer of my first year at RIT. I rented a studio along with an artist friend, Rick Metzgar, and continued to work on the tree imagery. I mention Rick's name because he and I seemed to be experiencing the same kind of changes in our work and as a result were able to carry on a dialogue about those changes. The move to the studio worked out well, because it gave me a chance to really get close to the imagery without too many interruptions.

Moving the paintings, (the tree series), from the city center to the studio made me reconsider the size I was working at. Almost immediately after getting settled in the new studio I took three of the largest paintings apart. Taking them apart gave me six smaller canvases to work on plus three others that I already had. The shift in size forced me to respond to the imagery differently. I whited out all the images, and decided to concentrate only on the drawing of the images rather than the painting of them. I chose this route because I felt that by limiting the palette to one color I could make changes rapidly, and hopefully move swiftly through the imagery. My focus was the hardware and the trees, but as the paintings developed new imagery worked itself into the picture plane. Before long, I lost all the old imagery, and was left only with the new stuff. The new imagery was comprised of more line drawings, this time showing blown up views of hardware. The hardware was usually attached to a nondescriptive square or triangle shape. The drawings were very animated but they lacked a direction. It was around then that I decided to work on paper. Mainly because I could work on many drawings at once, and that way explore my options with the imagery. The irony in this move was that I abandoned the previous drawings altogether, and ended up with twenty-four, almost identical, drawings of a log image. The same log image that had appeared earlier in a number of monoprints.

The end of summer came and I had little to show for it other than twenty-four images of the same log. What baffled me the most was not the singular log image, but rather twenty-four images of the same thing. The log image represented a structure I could identify with, because its association was clear to me. But repeating that image made little sense other than being a way of validating its presence in my mind. The act of repeating an object intrigued me, and so it was with this intrigue that I entered my second year at RIT.

A STEP AWAY FROM PAINTING

My main concern as I entered my second year was whether I was going to paint any more. I was having a tough time working with a two-dimensional format and felt limited by it. I was also disagreeing with the notion of having a painting as an end result of the painting process. My concern with the painting process led me to question the operation of a painting as an end to an artistic means. Ultimately, I was left with the conclusion that a painting, because of its nature as an object, will usually end up as a decorative element. This conclusion led me to rethink my own approach to art, and to think about how I wanted my art to function. Working with a three-dimensional format as well as a two-dimensional one, would be the first step in resolving some of my artistic concerns.

The transition from painting to a three-dimensional format was a series of graphite drawings done on paper primed with white latex house paint. The series consisted of twenty drawings using three stenciled images; a hammer, a man's head, and a woman's head. Some drawings were a combination of these images juxtaposed with each other, and other drawings were an image by itself, maybe repeated three or four times. The series came to be known as the hammerhead series. The drawings revolved around the idea of a world where men had hammers attached to their heads.

What I discovered through these drawings was that I could create an unlimited number of drawings about a hammerhead society with only a limited pictorial vocabulary. The series turned out to be an eventful exercise in the use of metaphor. It also prepared my way of thinking about the three-dimensional object as another use for metaphor. In this respect, in light of the metaphor, my incorporation of the three-dimensional object was much easier to understand.

THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL AND A NEW ALLUSION

My move into the three-dimensional went rather smoothly and I felt good about the transition. Again, as in the earlier work, I had a strong desire to repeat the imagery. In a sense, economizing my use of visual data much in the way of Andy Warhol. I played around with a number of images and eventually found a source of imagery that had something I could work with. The source I came up with was war, more specifically war machines. This source material would last me right up to the work of the Thesis Show, varying slightly here and there during that time.

Along with my desire to economize my visual data was a desire to economize my choice of material. Meaning that some of the material I chose to use would be recycled material or found object. I'm sure my choice of material had something to do with the attitude of the times, with our need to recycle and therefore save the planet. It also had to do with the need to stress idea, rather than material preciousness and preservation. This concern stems from a larger concern dealing with art production. I prefer the development of an idea more than the production of an object, but at the same time realize the importance of the production process.

What I didn't expect with the shift into the three-dimensional was that allusion would replace illusionistic space. Because of the shift, illusionistic space was automatically fulfilled and in return gave way to allusion in the shape of metaphor. This is not to say that allusion cannot be found in two-dimensional work, but rather that by working three-dimensionally one might be, at least in my case, more aware of its presence. Overall, the shift into the three-dimensional has worked out well and has proven itself as a logical solution for developing ideas that might have otherwise been denied through the painting process.

THESIS IS WAR

Much of the work produced in my second year related to war. Partly because I find war machines seductive, and partly because recent U.S. history has involved war, a phenomenon hard to ignore, starting with Granada, then with Panama, and then with Iraq. As the second year progressed my ideas on war became more and more formulated. I soon realized it was inevitable that my Thesis Show would deal with the topic of war. My main concern in dealing with this topic was to keep the work out of a specific time frame, therefore allowing the viewer to formulate a response solely on conjecture.

Much of the work in the show was achieved through a formalized process of deconstructing information into segmented units. The segmented units were then reconstructed within a formulated framework as a means of compiling information. The framework varied for each work in the show. There were a total of four works, two of which were based on a rectangular grid. Another was based on a number of concentric circles with the center acting as a nucleus for the rest of the piece. And the last one was inherently a rectangle to begin with and was left as such. The circle and the rectangle are very basic forms and lend themselves quite well as building blocks, or as vessels for information.

We, the people, seem to receive information on war in a very segmented and extremely chaotic way. I relate this largely to the way the information is dished out to us by the media. The reconstruction of this information comes as a necessity, at least for me, for understanding what this information means. In this respect, I felt it was natural to segment this information and compile it into a visual framework.

STATEMENT FOR THESIS SHOW

My statement for the Thesis Show was brief and concise. I was concerned about the amount of information I would give the viewer, and was reluctant to give the viewer any leads into the work other than what the titles implied. My statement read like this:

These installations represent an interest in repetition, pattern, and structure. Each piece is a formal response to a varied number of social issues and can operate on different levels of meaning.

The purpose of this statement was to heighten the sense of pattern and structure within the work. It was also meant to imply the presence of a social content. It was left to the viewer to decide what that content might be about. I'm aware, at the same time, that not every viewer will be willing to think about the work, and that's alright. My rationale being, that's human nature.

COUNTING DEVICE

Counting Device was the first of the four installations in the Thesis Show. Its origin stemmed from a very simple idea based on a counting device used in billiards to keep track of games won. The idea of a counting device intrigued me, and I soon came to the realization that the specific use of such a device was secondary to the function of it. That it didn't matter what the use was as long as it could be used. So I opted for a device that had no specific application. With this in mind I felt less committed to a specific structure.

The structure I came up with was based on a seven unit by seven unit grid. The number seven had no specific meaning in the piece, other than being a number that intuitively seemed right. The grid was layed out on roofers felt with blue chalk line. These two materials, the chalk line and the felt, are materials I'm familiar with and therefore felt comfortable using. Fourty-seven units out of the fourty-nine in the grid were assigned a ceramic tile, made previously for the billiard idea. Each tile had an inch and a half hole and hung on a porcelain insulator centered within each unit. The insulator was chosen for its pristine surface quality, which represented an extreme opposite in contrast to the raw surface of the tile, and also because it was visually striking on the black felt background. On each side of the grid was an insulator, these were meant to correlate with the internal function of the piece. This was implied by two diagonal chalk lines coming from the top and the bottom of the grid to the insulator. As a counting device the piece could be used by moving a tile from one grid to another, or from one grid to an insulator on the side. With each movement one would be left with two unoccupied insulators, these would then operate as indicators for a given application.

Because this piece was placed within the context of three other pieces dealing with war, it could very easily be viewed as relating to war. In this sense one could see it as a counting device for number of soldiers killed, or for tanks destroyed, or just as a device for the act of counting which could become as absurd as war itself. The latter of these three is how I tend to see this piece as operating. Mainly because it relates more to the act of counting than to what is actually being counted.

PUZZLE 1

Puzzle 1 was started during the development of *Counting Device*, and like many of the pieces I've done recently, developed out of an investigation with materials. It was triggered by some toy soldiers I had bought one day in a toy store, which I immediately related to our war with Iraq. I played around with these toy soldiers for awhile in the studio, trying to find some use for them in a piece. It wasn't long after, that I developed an idea for combining the soldier image with a canvas I had painted silver, and which had been sitting around in the studio.

The idea was to cast a shadow made by a toy soldier on to the canvas and then record that shadow as an outline with a black marker. After doing this I realized that one shadow was not enough, and that by filling up the canvas I could create a greater visual impact. This decision proved to be worthy but the canvas still lacked an impact. My sister had given me a Norman Rockwell puzzle for Christmas no doubt thinking of the artist in me. The puzzle, I felt, could add something to the piece.

The puzzle portrays a young boy running away from home. The image is of a boy sitting on a stool in an icecream parlor where he appears to be having a conversation with a policeman, who is sitting on the next stool over. Across from them, behind the bar, is the icecream attendant attentively listening in. It registered in my mind that the boy was leaving home in a vulnerable condition, and that his situation related very much to the soldier going off to war. To make this connection apparent, I took a piece of the boy in the puzzle and assigned it to a shadow on the canvas until all of what represented the boy was gone. This entered the piece into a narrow political arena and I was concerned about it being improperly interpreted. It operated much like a one liner which I didn't want. I chose to develop the piece more so that it would appear open ended.

The canvas was made visually very active by adding the puzzle, but remained stable physically which made me think of an atom's nucleus. This in turn made me think of electron levels found around an atom's nucleus. Electrons are passed back and forth among these levels, sometimes adding electrons to a level and other times canceling them out. The canvas as I saw it represented the nucleus, and that by adding concentric rings around it, depicting levels, I could make it function like an atom. I could then have toy soldiers placed on the rings, acting as electrons, with some soldiers being canceled out.

As with *Counting Device*, this piece developed very quickly into an installation. I chose for the background the black roofers felt and drew on it five large white concentric rings. In the center of the rings I placed the canvas. On the rings themselves I placed little wooden shelves, with each shelf holding a toy soldier. The soldiers were yellow or black. The yellow represented an activated soldier and the black represented a cancelled out soldier. Each one of the yellow soldiers was placed in front of a small silver rectangle, indicating an association with the canvas/nucleus. The black soldiers had only the felt as a background which made them difficult to detect, therefore

appearing canceled out. Some rings had more soldiers than others representing an inconsistency that might occur in the activated area.

Most of the materials used in this piece were left in their raw state. This was done intentionally to play down the precious quality so often attributed to works of art. My hope by doing this, was to make one more aware of material as a means of getting at an idea. The importance of this piece was not so much the social statement or the idea behind it, but rather the use of materials and what they meant in a new context to the viewer. Taking materials out of their original context and putting them in another is exciting, and speaks much about the idea of freedom. Finding freedom to create is a strong concern of mine. It is my hope that the person viewing my work will walk away with same concern.

PUZZLE 2

Puzzle 2 was simply the Norman Rockwell puzzle without the pieces comprising the image of the boy. This piece was shown because it represented the origin of the missing image found in *Puzzle 1*. It was necessary for the viewer to make the connection between the two to understand the significance of that image. I placed the two pieces away from each other so that the connection would be less obvious. If the connection was made, it would occur as a reflection through space and time. It didn't matter which puzzle piece was viewed first as long as the second piece was viewed there after.

The decision for using the Rockwell puzzle came simply by chance. As I said earlier, the puzzle was given to me as a present, and happened to be present in the studio during the development of *Puzzle 1*. It worked out well for two reasons. First, it represented an imagery that I felt related to the circumstance of the soldier going off to war. And second, It represented an artist that many non-artists have taken a liking to. It was my desire to have the puzzle function as a work of art, and yet have the viewer question its integrity as art. The puzzle by itself meant very little as a work of art. It wasn't until the viewer made the connection with *Puzzle 1*, that the piece became more meaningful. The connection was the key to understanding the two pieces. If the connection wasn't made, then the pieces were more likely to operate on a visual, rather than conceptual, level.

INFORMATION RETRIEVAL, (with good guys and bad guys)

Information Retrieval was the last installation started before the show. Many of my ideas for this piece came from *Puzzle 1*. Again I was dealing with the subject of war. And again I was dealing with an overall structure, a ten unit by ten unit grid, as a means of compiling information. The materials I used were similar to the materials used in *Puzzle 1*, consisting of found objects and common manufactured goods. They were usually left in their found state, but in some cases were altered slightly. As in the earlier installations, my concern was less for the preservation of material and more about the expression of an idea.

The reasoning for this piece is based on a generalized idea I have about information retrieval, which consist of information given and the act of receiving that information. In this case the information is about war, and the person receiving it is myself. The compilation of this information, through the creative process, is the resultant. After I have compiled the information it is again ready to be received, but this time by the viewer of the installation. The information I received on war was broken down into eight key elements; a good guy, a bad guy, a man, a woman, a good act, a bad act, money, and the unknown. Each one of the eight elements was assigned a specific visual representation. The man and the woman are the only two elements with four representations. There are two views for each, a front view and a back view. This makes a total of ten representations for all. The representations were either two-dimensional or three-dimensional, depending on the element being represented. All of these were placed in a specific pattern on the grid so that in any location, vertically or horizontally, all of the elements are accounted for. The pattern is difficult to perceive visually, but it can be detected. I couldn't help but relate this to the difficult nature of deciphering war.

The representations of money, and the two frontal views of the man and the woman are also difficult to perceive. Each are covered up with blocks of felt paper thereby inhibiting their acknowledgement by the viewer. These can only be seen if one lifts the felt up, which not everyone is willing to do. There can be a number of different reasons for this, but the fact is some people just won't make the initiative. This then, through a quick association, relates to the lack of questioning so often found during war.

Although this piece represents a number of social concerns, it is not meant to act simply as a social statement. At its very least, it represents a need to understand war through the creative process. This then relates very much to the other installations, in that it speaks about the freedom of speech and about the freedom found in the creative process. The process of developing an idea, especially in an installation, is what I find most interesting. Its finding the freedom to create that is the most challenging.

CONCLUSION

My progression in art, in the past two years, has taken me away from painting and into the three-dimensional. I've come to the realization that my concern for art lies more with the idea and the progression of that idea as it develops. I find, quite often, that the product of art is less interesting than its conception. My concern as I leave RIT is to find a balance between the two, if such a thing exists. At one time I said I would never go back to painting, but as I've become more familiar with what I'm doing, the installation, I realize that such a statement is self-defeating. One cannot rule out the possibility of any art form, because someday one might be more right for that art form than ever before. This will not be a step back but rather a step forward. If art is to progress it will probably happen in this way.

END QUOTES

The artist can have no other task than to make catalogues, inventories, and to watch out for small unfilled corners in order to conjure up there, in close ranks, the creations and the instruments of man. 1

In any mind, and most of all in original and developed minds, there are two crucial elements, the basic formula with which it interprets reality, and the peculiar sense of deficiency with which that mind always starts out along its way. 2

It is unavoidable for most men to have the psychology of the language which they have been taught. 3

¹ Roland Barthes, Mythologies (New York: The Noonday Press, 1990), p. 65.

² Ralph Harper, The seventh Solitude: Man's Isolation in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 138.

³ Roland Barthes, p. 45.

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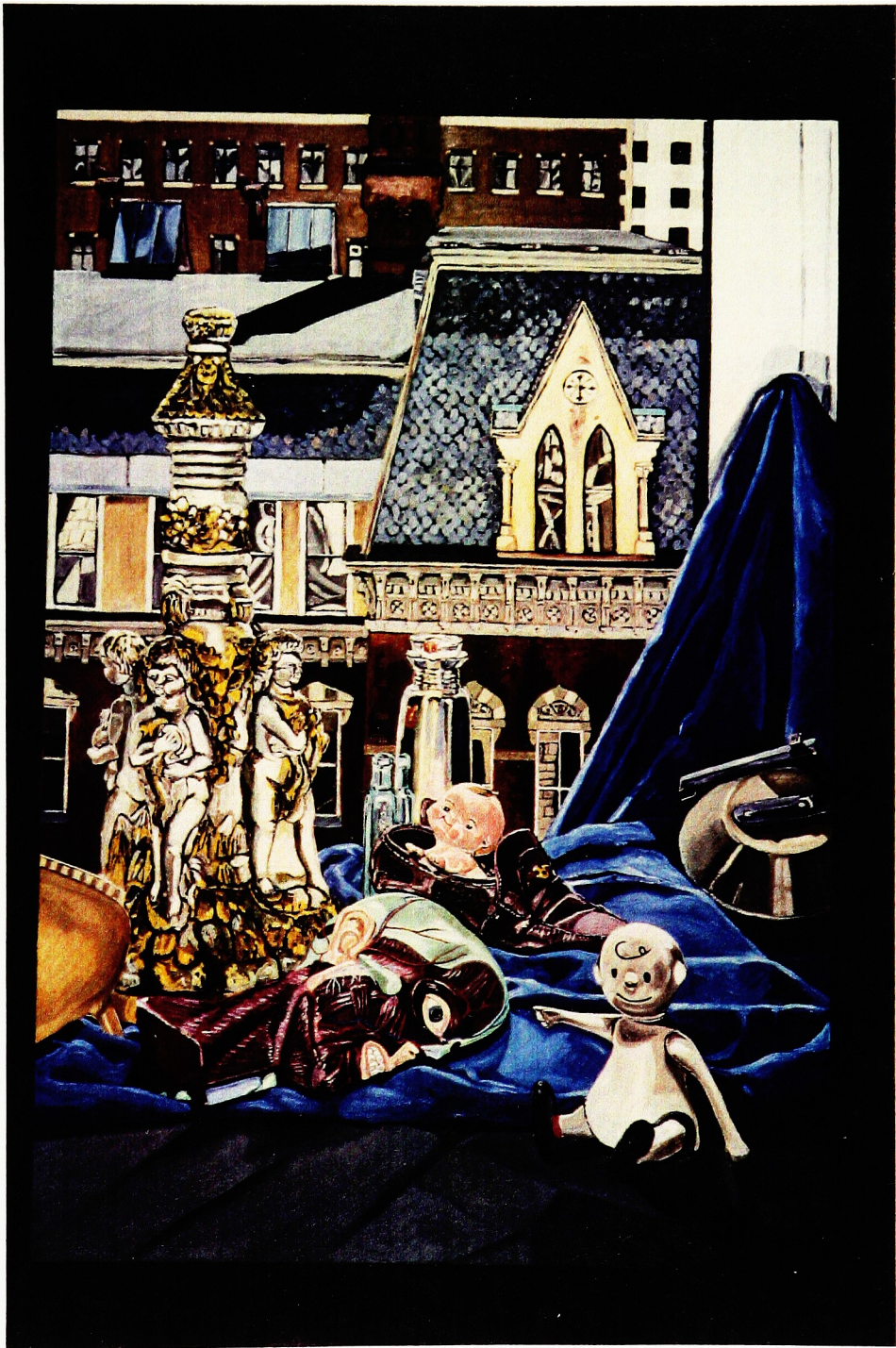
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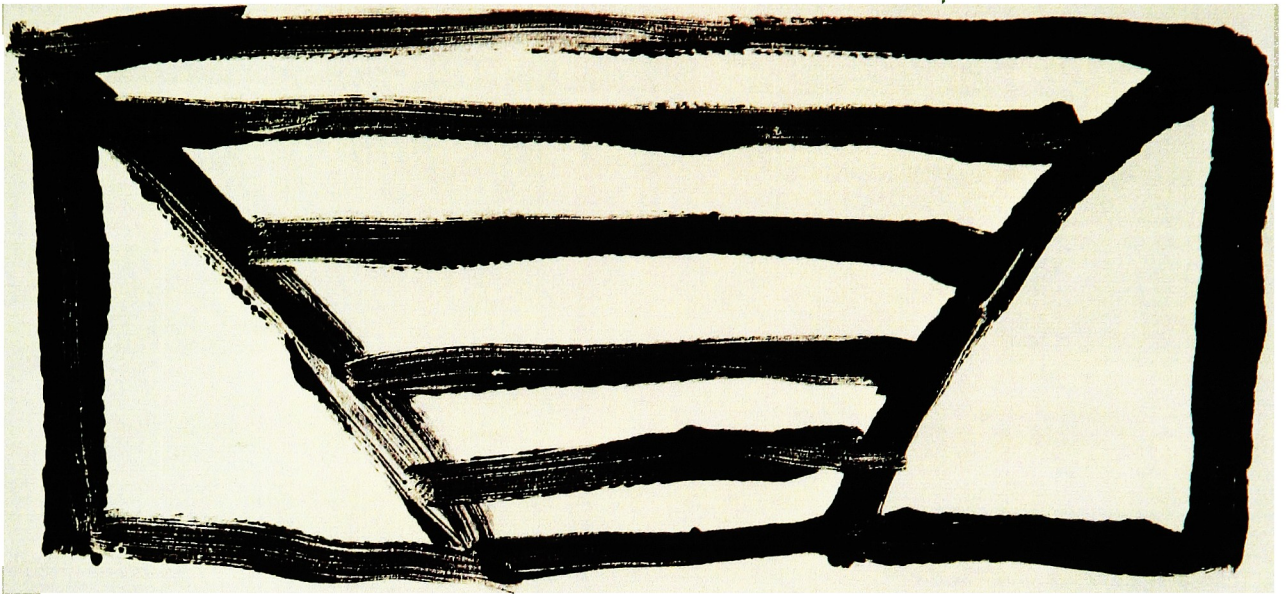
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Untitled, (Stilllife)
1990



Untitled, (Log)
1990



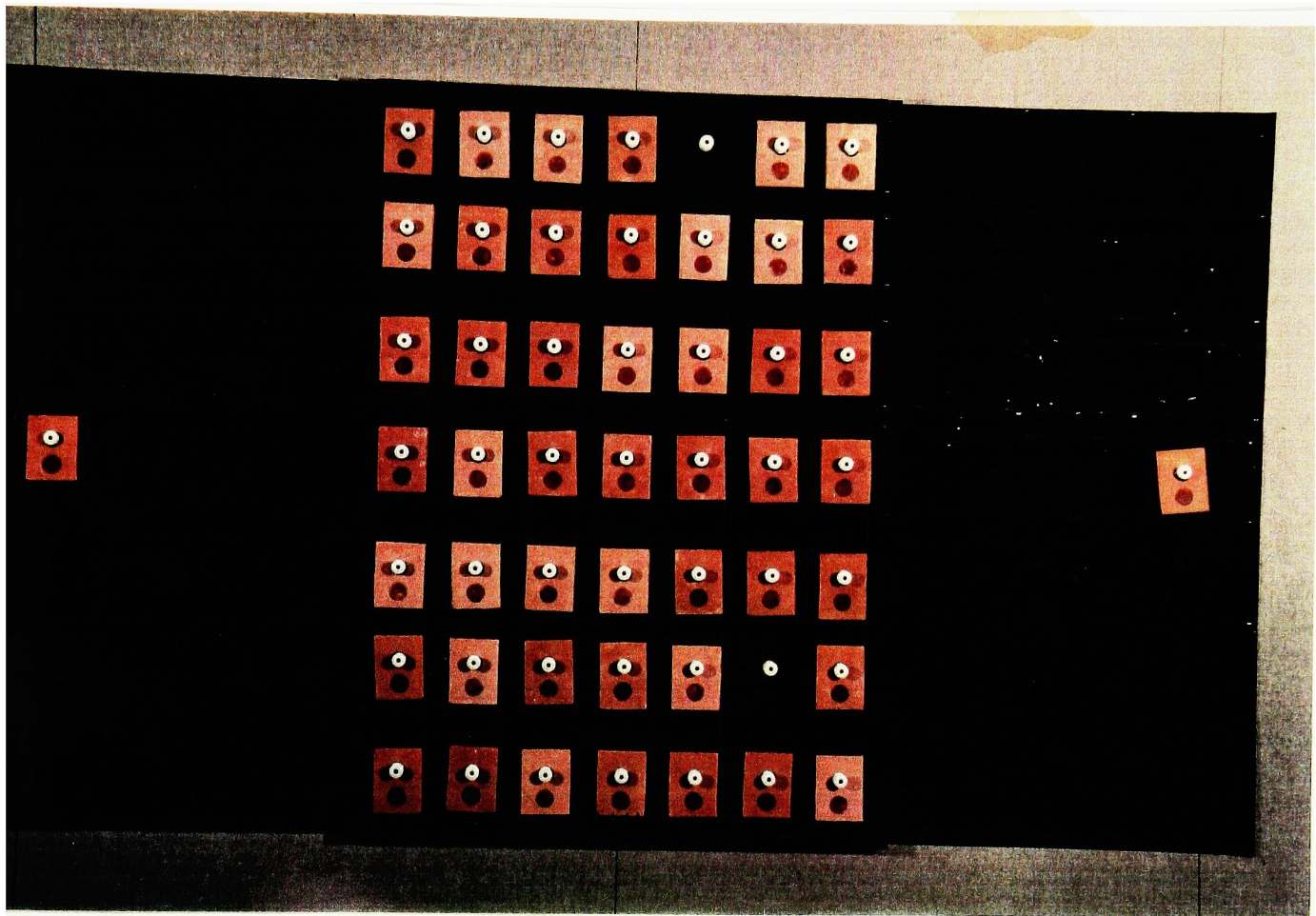
Log Form 1
1990



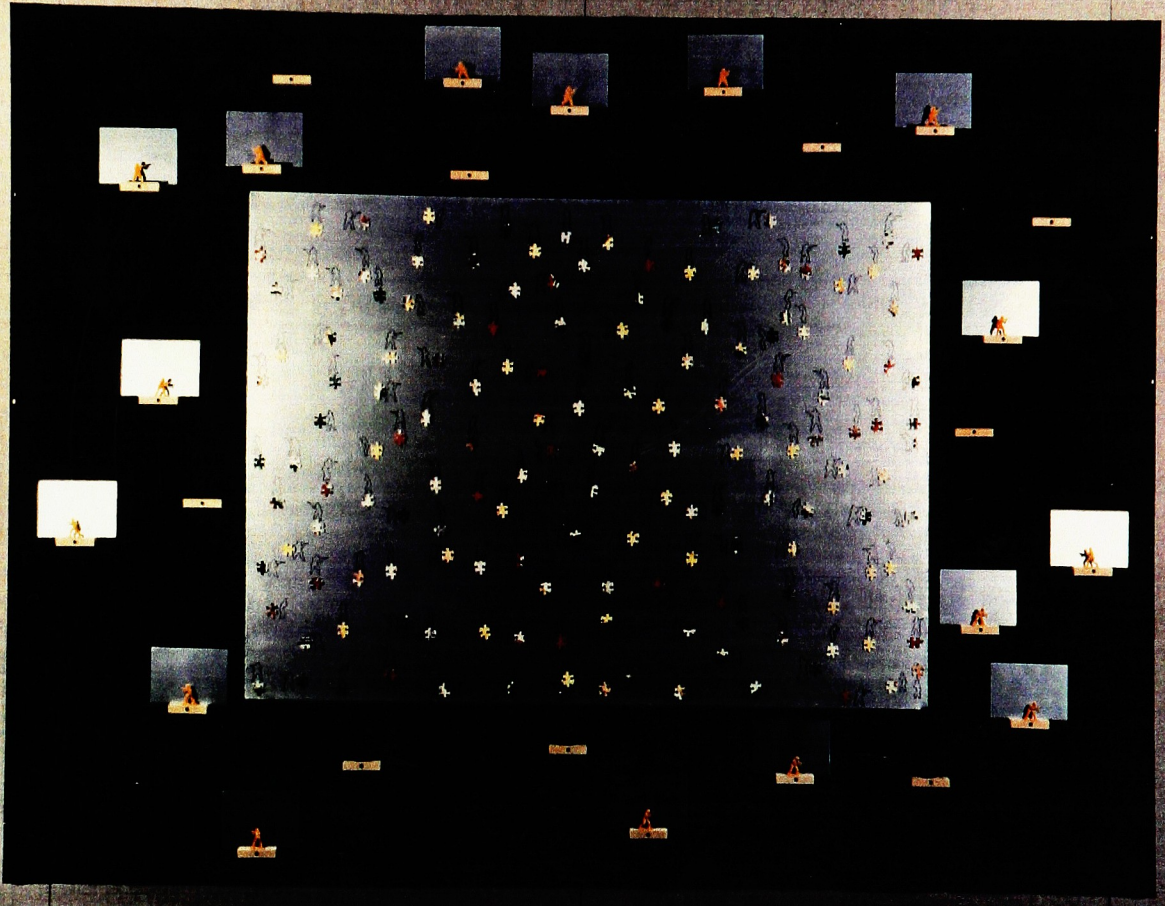
Wood Chopper
1990



Descent of the Woodsman
1990



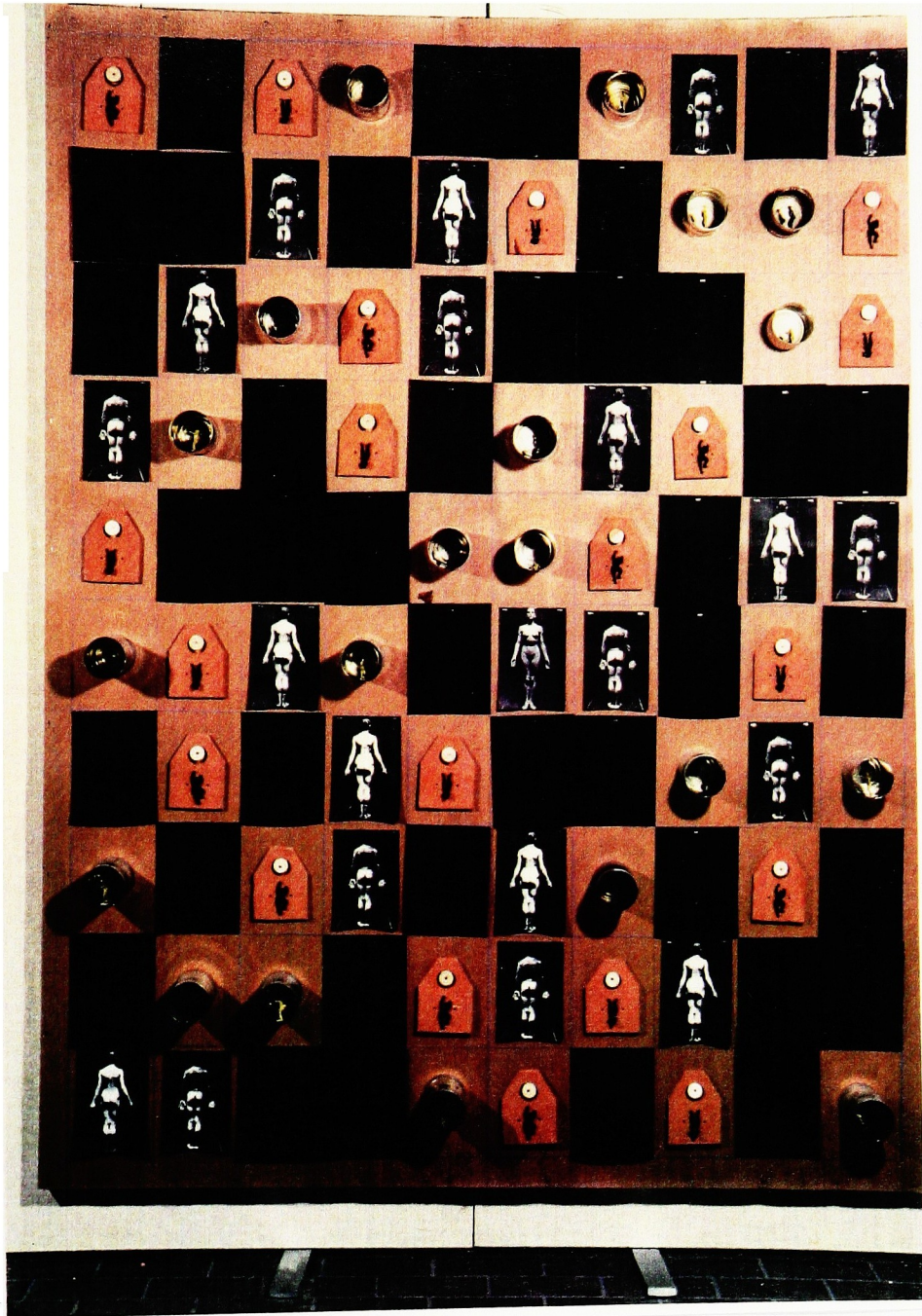
Counting Device
1991



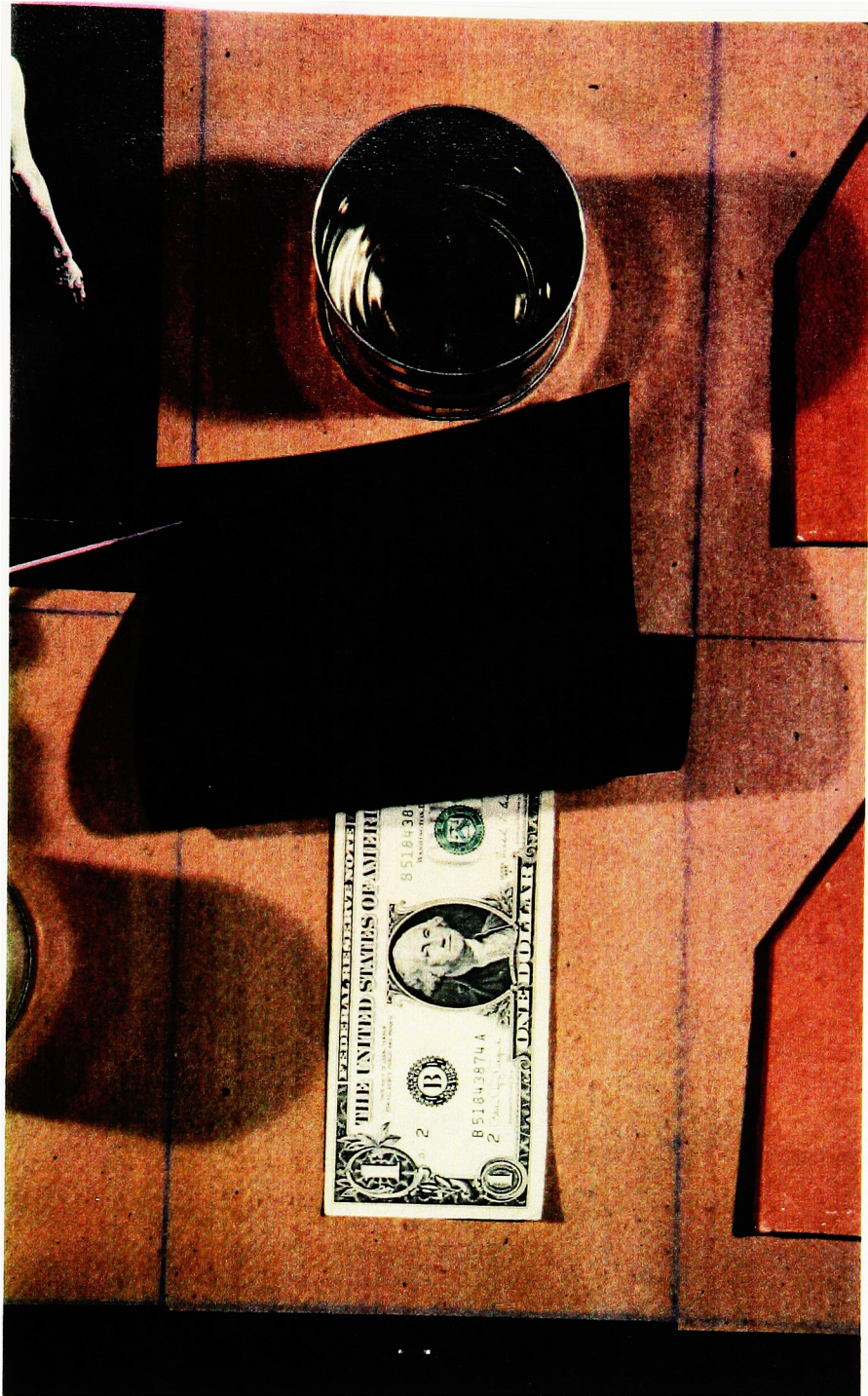
Puzzle 1
1991



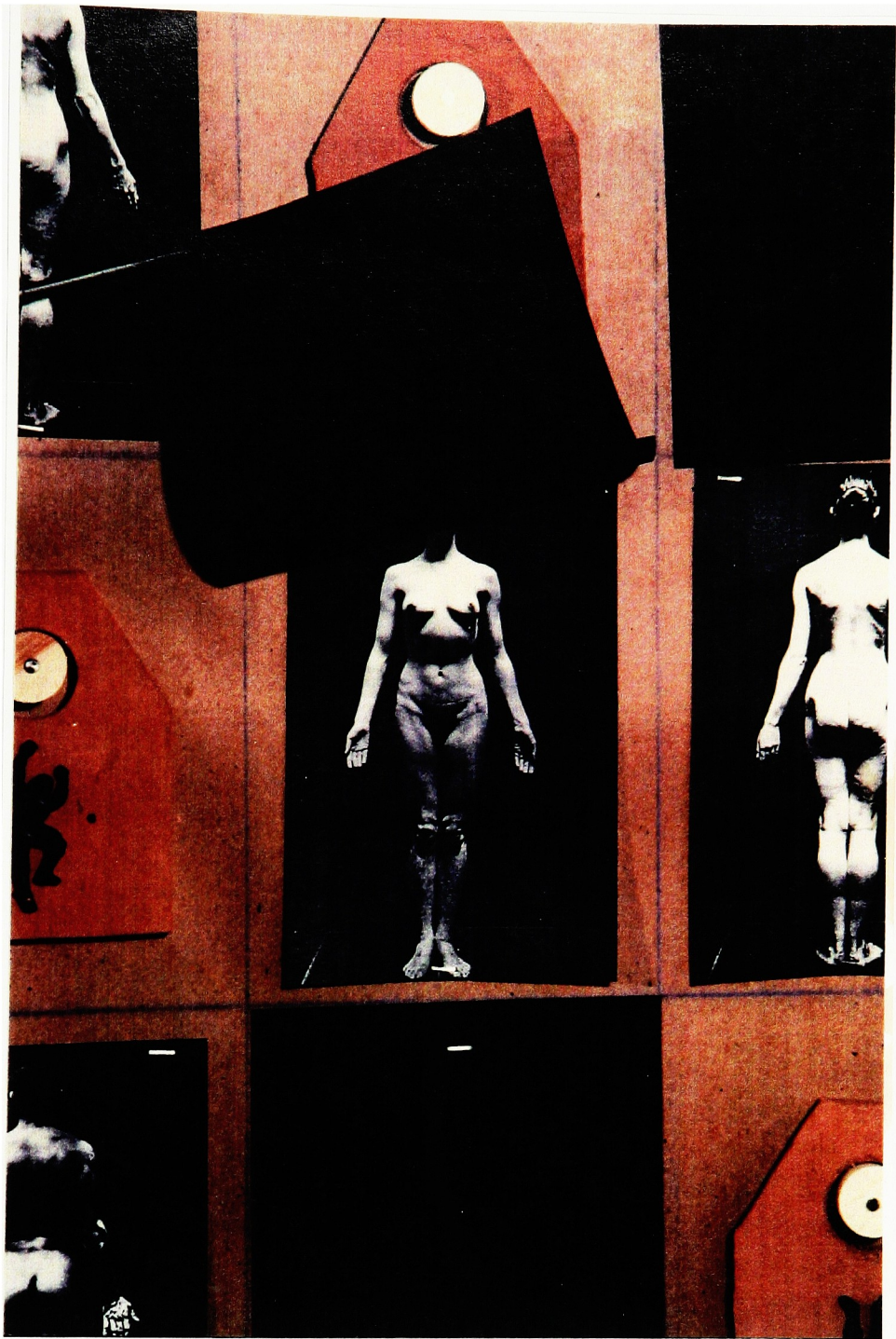
Puzzle 2
1991



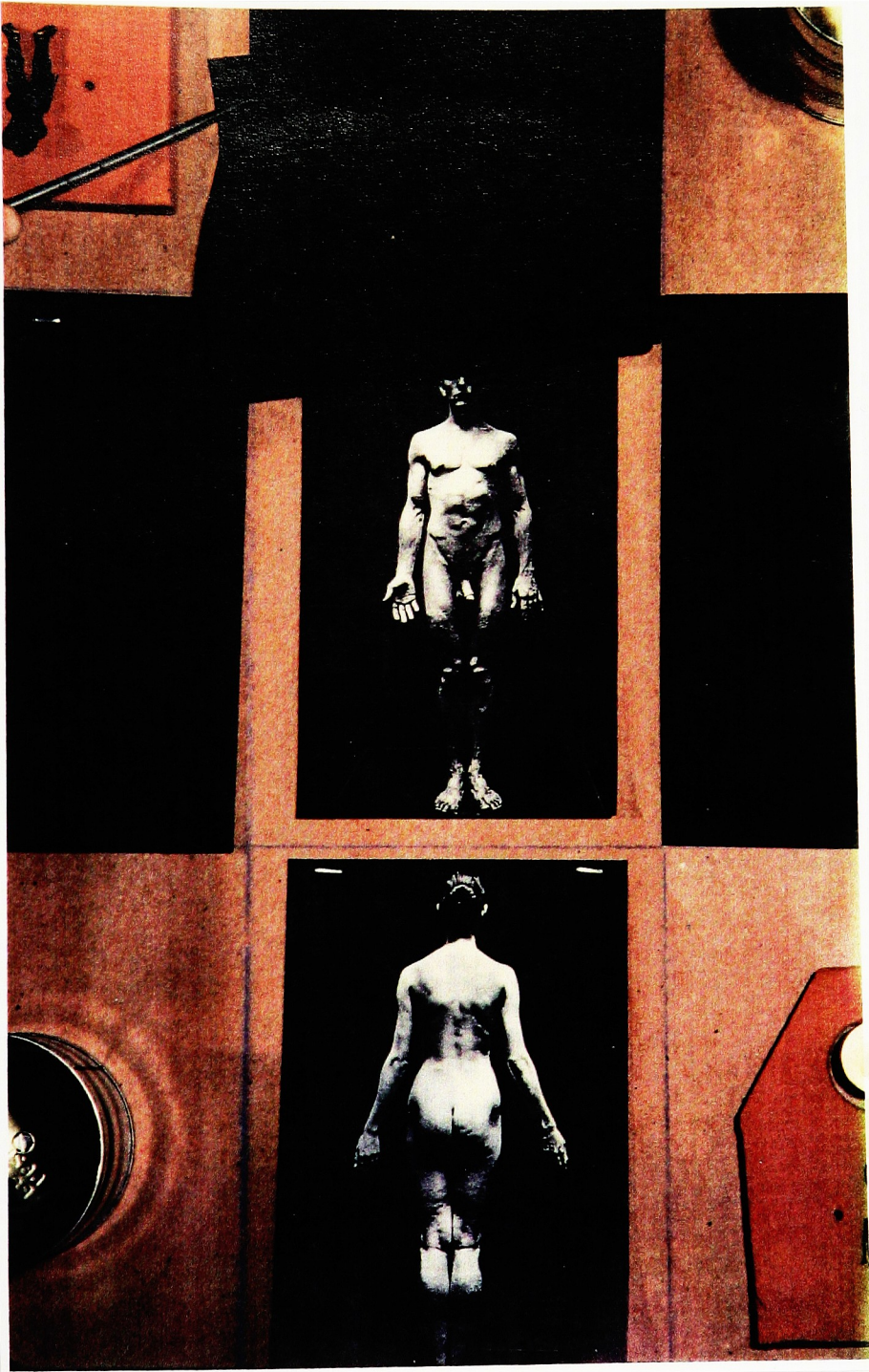
Information Retrieval, (with good guys and bad guys)
1991



Information Retrieval (detail)
1991



Information Retrieval (detail)
1991



Information Retrieval (detail)
1991

