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FORMERLY

ART & MAN

# Art With a Message

Special Feature on Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*



# The Pow



**COVER:** Mike Wilkins *Preamble*, 1987. Painted metal on vinyl and wood, 96" x 96". National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Nissan Motor Corporation.

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**"All my messages have to do with making contact."—Bruce Nauman**

Words have always been the most effective way to send messages. Visual images are also a dramatic way to communicate. Many artists have combined words and visuals to make powerful, unified works of art. To preserve ancient writings during the Middle Ages (476-1450) scholars spent years copying each word by hand. Artists used gold paint to *illuminate* some of the texts. They began adding fantastic details such as the hypnotic swirls and tiny human faces that

appear in the capital P (above). The art in many of these manuscripts became as important as the words.

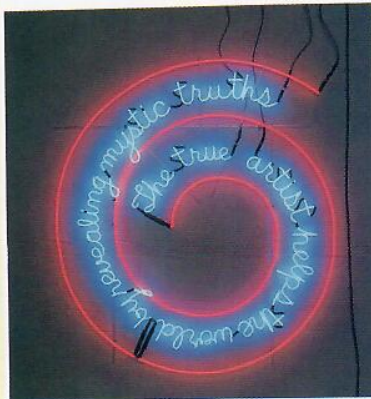
Today, many conceptual artists make words part of their images. Some artists use words to fight for a political cause. Others, to express serious thoughts about society and the artist's role in it. Some artists incorporate words in a lighthearted way to make viewers see something trite and familiar through fresh eyes.

American installation artist Jenny Holzer uses words to call attention to political and social injustices. Her open-ended, thought-provoking phrases like "abuse of power comes as no surprise" point out the way in which words affect and control us. Holzer's art appears in unexpected places—on the sides of buses, broadcast over MTV, on marble benches, above water fountains, and printed on T shirts (right).

In his installations, Bruce Nauman questions the meanings of words by using them in unexpected ways. A neon beer sign gave him the idea for the piece below. Instead of "beer," Nauman's sign says *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*. The inspirational words contrast with the garish and commercial format. The piece also suggests the lofty expectations the public requires from art and the artist's insecurity about fulfilling these expectations.

Not all conceptual art is serious and hard to understand. In *Preamble* (on the cover), made for the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, Mike Wilkins has reinterpreted a famous document that has grown stale over the years. To create this piece, he ordered personalized licence plates from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia and assembled them. Can you read the message the artist is sending?

**From medieval manuscripts (above) to works by contemporary artists (left), language has always had an important place in the visual arts.**



TOP: Page from the Book of Kells, Irish, c. 800. Trinity College, Dublin. LEFT: Bruce Nauman, b. 1941. *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967. Neon tubing, 59" x 55" x 2". Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo, the Netherlands.

# er of **Words**



"Language fascinates me because it communicates in a way that painting can't."  
—Jenny Holzer

Jenny Holzer, b. 1950.  
from *Truisms*, 1977-  
1979. T-shirt worn by  
Lady Pink. New York,  
1983.

# Messages of

**“We cannot just transform images. We must shift our perspectives, change our way of looking.”**

**—Chila Kumari Burman**

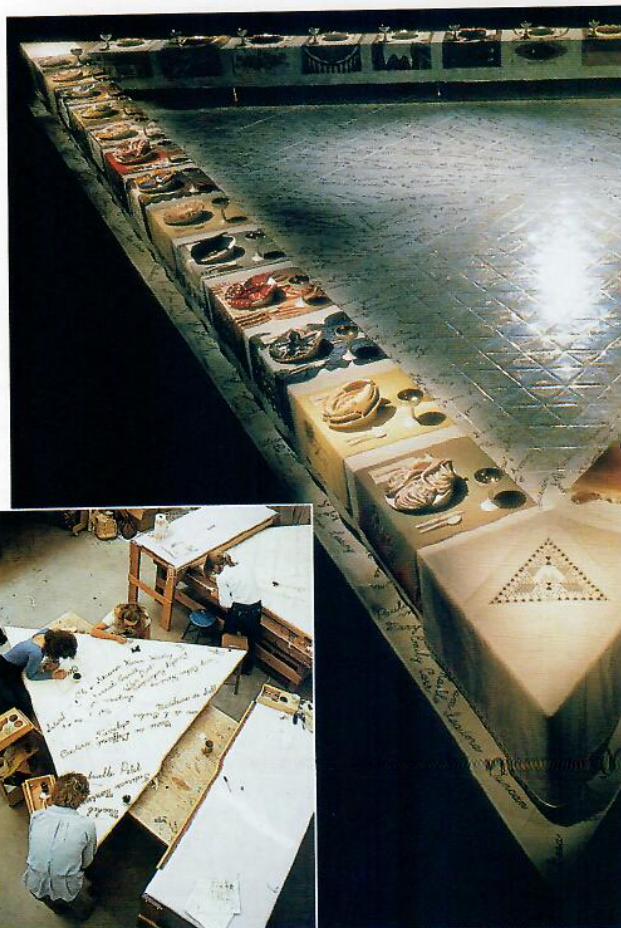
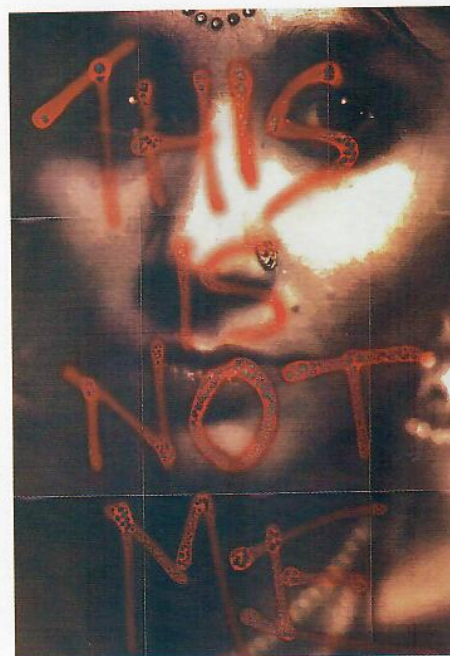
**M**any artists create works that call attention to political and social injustices. Chila Kumari Burman, an artist of Asian descent working in Britain, is determined to be recognized beyond the stereotypes of her race and gender. The message that runs through her work is the creativity of Indian women. Her videos, installations, and performance pieces combine family photos and home videos with soundtracks containing rap, reggae, and Hindi film music. *This Is Not Me* (above right) is one in a series of self-portraits. In each, the artist takes on a different role, changing race, gender, and class. Each portrait is obscured by the title words written in spray paint as the artist moves on to her next identity.

All through her career, contemporary American artist Judy Chicago has struggled to free herself from the traditional limitations placed on women artists. The theme of her best-known work, *The Dinner Party* (right and 8-9), is the celebration of women throughout the ages. This large room-size installation takes the form of a huge triangular dining table. It contains place settings for 39 women, both real and mythological. Names of hundreds of other women who contributed to society or the arts are written into the tiles (below right) that make up the *Heritage Floor*. The artist and 400 assistants spent five years creating this work. In it, Chicago combines techniques traditionally considered “women’s work”—china painting, embroidery, sewing, and handwriting.

Contemporary African-British installation artist Keith Piper’s main

theme over the past 15 years has been racial prejudice. Words are very important to the artist. Voice-overs, writing, or type are almost always integrated with his images. He frequently uses the figures of popular black male sports heroes to make his point. The artist feels that white people have mixed feelings about black sports superstars. They admire them for their abilities and the fame their skills have won. They also envy and resent them for the same reasons.

In *Transgressive Acts* (far right), Piper suggests that people of another race are seen as stereotypes—all good or all bad. Boxer Muhammad Ali, disliked and feared in the 1960s, is now considered an all-American hero. On the other hand, boxer Mike Tyson is seen by many as a violent fighting machine. So the artist has “labeled” the two men—Saint and Sinner. Piper treats the boxers as religious images. The backlit computer-generated shapes, high-contrast colors, black outlines, and “carved” letters make their figures resemble stained glass windows.



# Protest

**LEFT: "I am attempting to move with ease between Asian and Western culture."**

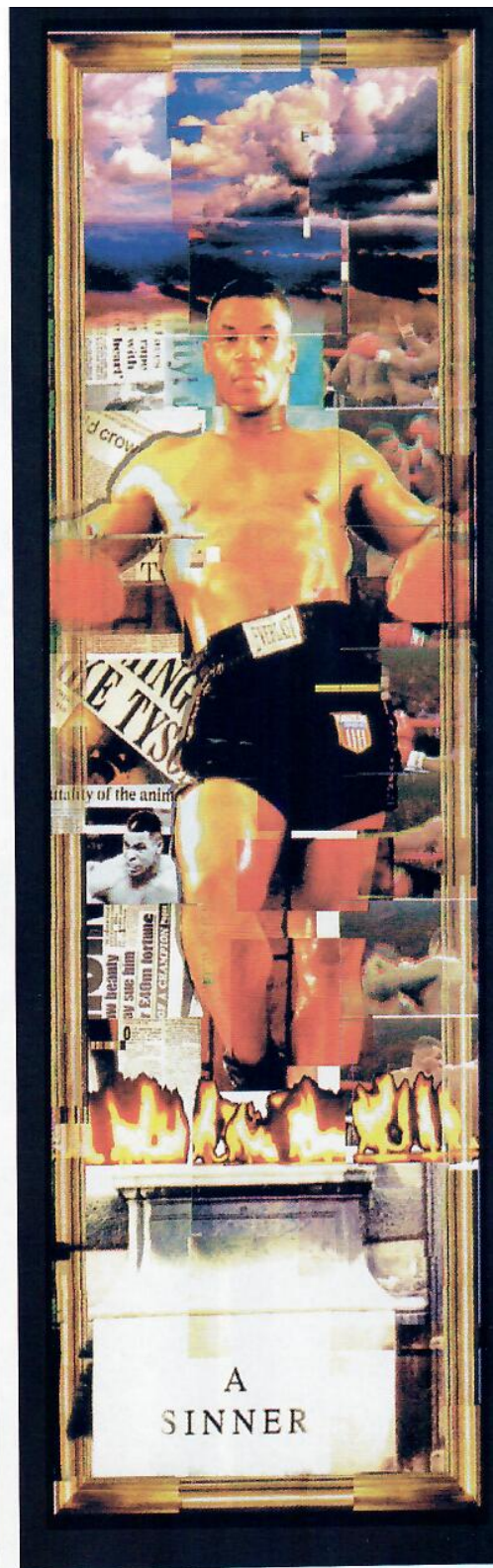
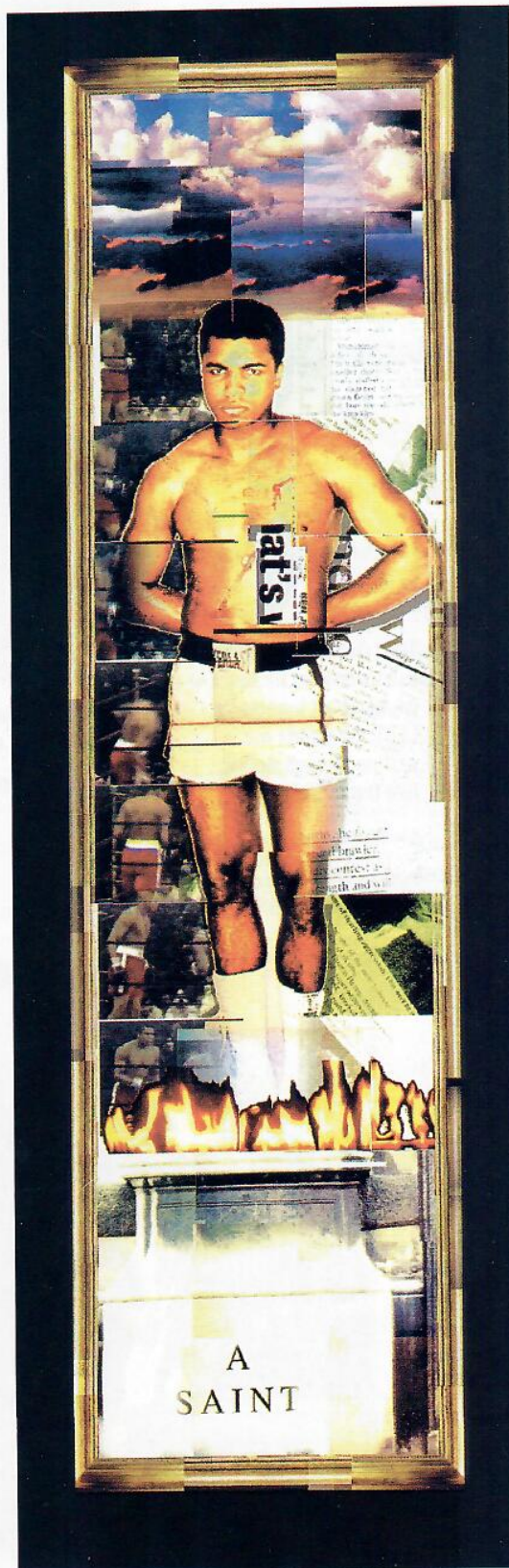
**—Chila Kumari Burman**

Chila Kumari Burman, b. 1958. *This Is Not Me*, 1992. Laser print and car spray paint, 35" x 27". © Chila Kumari Burman

**BELOW: "Men had a last supper, but women have had dinner parties."**

**—Judy Chicago**

Judy Chicago, b. 1939. *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79. Mixed media. © 1979 Judy Chicago. Photos © Donald Woodman

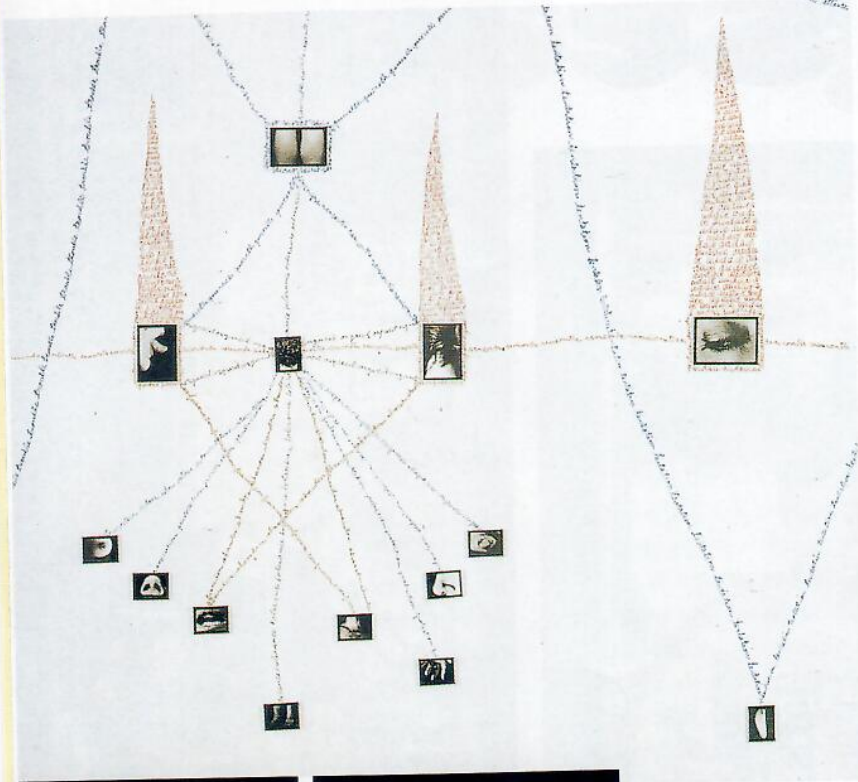


**"I want to put out a series of open-ended elements to tease and irritate the spectator."**

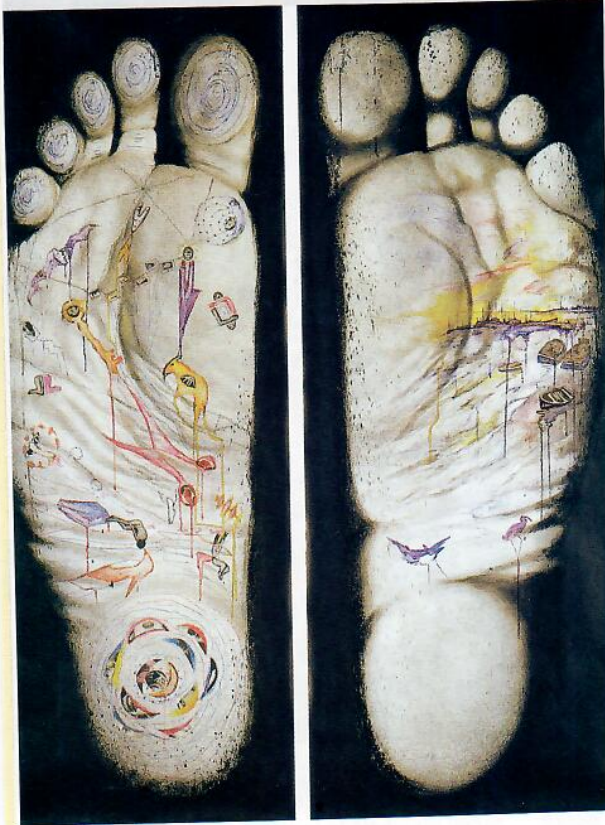
**—Keith Piper**

Keith Piper, b. 1960. *Transgressive Acts (Portrait of a Saint and a Sinner)*, 1993. Amiga computer montage. © Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved.

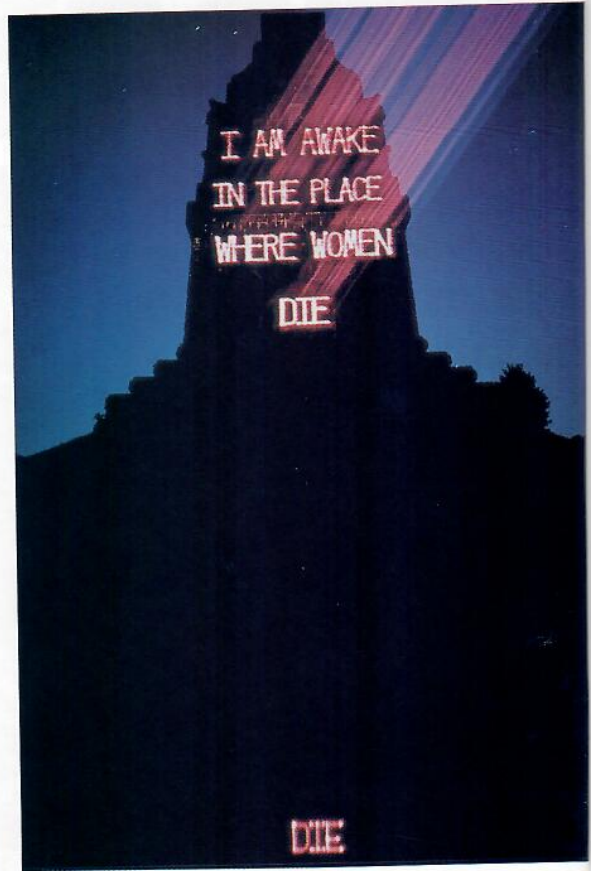




**TOP:** Annette Messager uses words to tie her works of art together. **LEFT:** She adds more writing to each detail, like these feet.



Annette Messager, b. 1943. *My Works*, 1987 (details). Prints under glass and colored pencil on wall. Le Consortium, Dijon, France.



**ABOVE:** Many of installation artist Jenny Holzer's most powerful works focus on women's issues.

Jenny Holzer, b. 1950. Laser projection on the Battle of Nations Monument, Leipzig, Germany, 1996.



**We don't need**

**RIGHT:** "I feel that stereotypes are formed very early in life."  
—Barbara Kruger

Barbara Kruger b. 1945. *We Don't Need Another Hero*, 1987. Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 108 4/4" x 157 3/4". Mary Boone Gallery, N.Y., N.Y.

# Women's Voices

**“I want to make the big issues intelligible in the form of public art.” —Jenny Holzer**

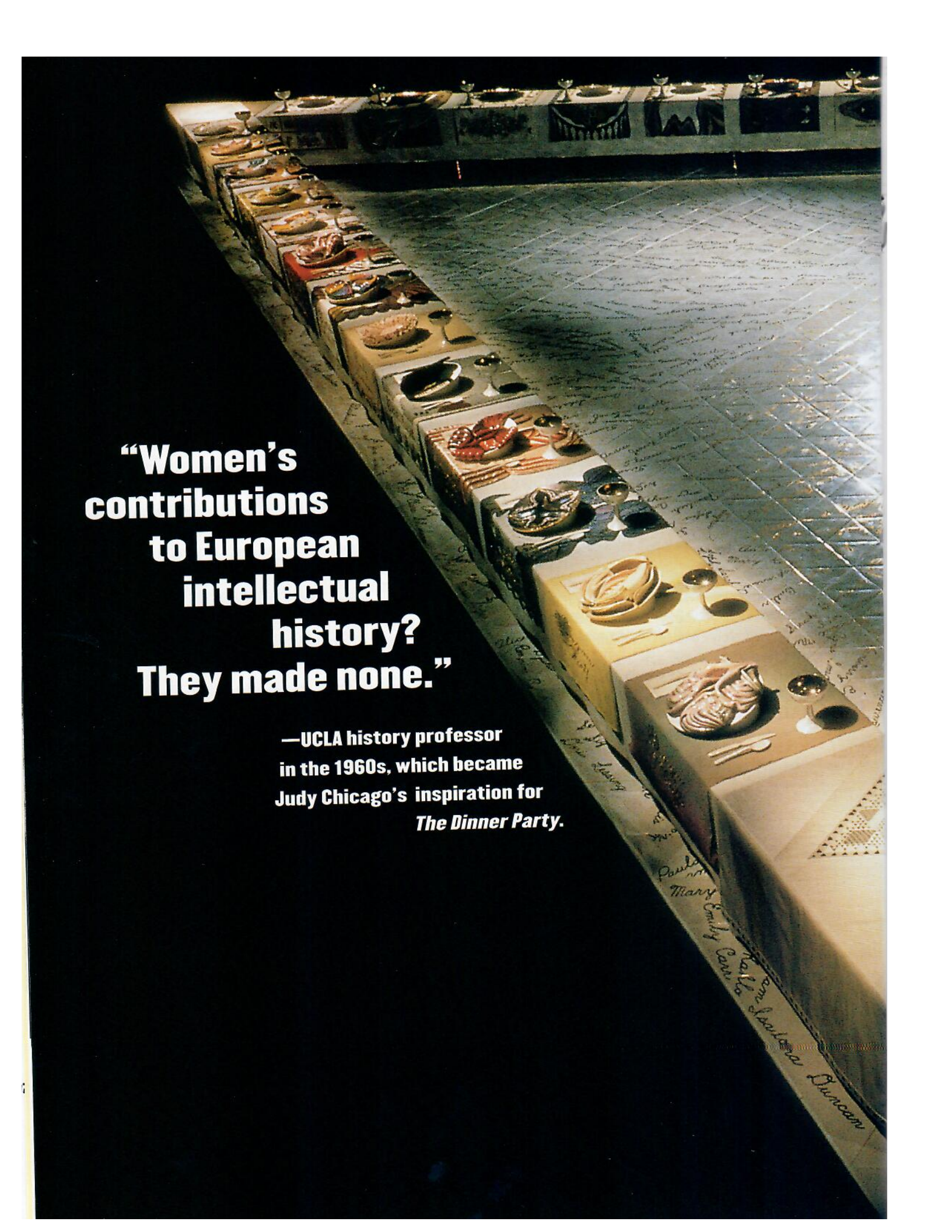
Jenny Holzer's use of mass-media technology contrasts with the kinds of very personal and “sincere” messages she sends. The artist has put her words on T-shirts (page 3). She has sent her thoughts out using the computer animated billboard in New York City's Times Square. She has also put them on London theater marquees, and presented them on a stadium scoreboard in San Francisco. Many of Holzer's works have to do with the stereotypical roles she feels women have always played. Her messages include sentences like, “Raise boys and girls the same way,” or “romantic love was invented to manipulate women.” One of the artist's most recent projects was a series of laser images projected on the side of a building (top left) in Germany. In this presentation, Holzer shows violence against women from three points of view. The words “I am awake in the place where women die” might be ascribed to any of the three — the victim, the aggressor, or the observer.

Contemporary French artist Annette Messager created the

large installation on the far left (the feet are an enlarged detail from that work). In it, she uses language both for its meaning and as a visual element. The artist makes long lists of words that appeal to her and keeps looking at them while creating her pieces. She chooses words that describe feelings or emotional states that have traditionally been associated with women—fear, quiet, protection, shy, weak, passive. Repetition is important. “Repeating the same word thousands of times, you end up forgetting the meaning,” she says. In *My Works*, she uses small photos of her own body. Dozens of close-ups of eyes, ears, fingers, and feet are spread over an entire wall. They are linked by lines of handwritten text. The artist explains, “I feel that my identity as a woman and an artist is divided and disintegrated. . . . I always perceive the body in fragments.”

The image (below, left) *We Don't Need Another Hero*, a picture of a young boy and girl, was created by contemporary American Barbara Kruger. Kruger creates messages that are meant to shock, surprise, or puzzle. She wants the viewer to think about the way people's thoughts and attitudes are formed by society's rules. Her work is not objective; she always has a point of view. The artist enlarges and crops photos taken from ads, fashion photography, and films. She chooses old-fashioned images that feature female stereotypes and juxtaposes them with accusing messages. These words, printed in heavy white type and set inside red boxes, stand out against the stark black-and-white photos. This work comments on the early indoctrination of sexual roles. A young girl in a frilly dress and pigtails admires a boy who flexes his muscles in a “macho” show of power. The artist's opinion is clearly stamped in bright red on top of the image.





**“Women’s  
contributions  
to European  
intellectual  
history?  
They made none.”**

—UCLA history professor  
in the 1960s, which became  
Judy Chicago’s inspiration for  
*The Dinner Party*.



MASTERPIECE  
OF THE  
MONTH #6

SCHOLASTIC  
**ART**

# The Dinner Party

by **Judy Chicago**

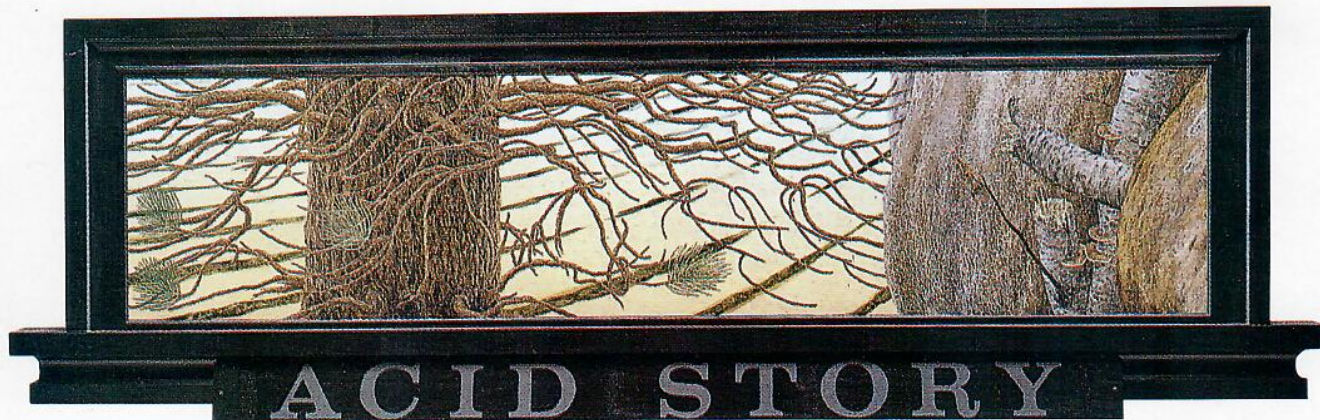
Judy Chicago, b. 1939. *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79. Mixed media, 48' x 42' x 3'. © 1979 Judy Chicago. Photo © Donald Woodman.  
Collection *The Dinner Party* Trust.

SCHOLASTIC ART 8 & 9

# Saving the Ea

**"For whatever happens to the plants and animals happens to the humans."**

**— Chief Seattle**



Contemporary American Neil Jenney's haunting visions echo his anxieties about the future of the American landscape. At first glance, this very realistic scene (above) looks peaceful. Fir trees grow beside a rippling pond, which mirrors the cloudless blue sky above. The fact that we see only a fragment of this landscape through a bunkerlike slit gives the work a slightly unsettling

feeling. But the bold text under the scene hints that something might be very wrong, especially when the title is as ominous as *Acid Story*. If you look at the work closely, you can see that the branches of the pine tree on the left are nearly stripped of needles. And the mushroom-covered tree stumps on the right have managed to grow only one sickly branch and a dead leaf. The crude, coffinlike black frame can be

seen as a stage setting that presents a close-up view of nature going wrong.

Jaune Quick to See Smith—a Native American artist of Flathead, Cree, and Shoshone tribal heritage—is very concerned about the fate of the American West. She feels the environment is being attacked by the timber and mining industries, nuclear waste is increasing, and the once-pure air and water are being polluted. She expresses these concerns in

her art by combining ancient pictographs, modern painting techniques, and English words. In *Rainbow* (below, left), the artist has included a passage from a speech given by Chief Seattle in 1854. His fear that the Old West and all the creatures that live there will be destroyed by the greed of human beings is as real today as it was nearly 150 years ago. The written words have become part of the image of the curved rainbow. The bright colors of the rainbow symbolize hope as it floats above the scarred and eroded surface of the earth. Through her art, Smith wants to preserve the once beautiful landscape known to her ancestors.

Brazilian conceptual artist Jac Leirner (jock lairn-YEA) comments on today's culture of waste in a different way. By combining nonbiodegradable plastic shopping bags from a number of countries, the artist makes a statement about worldwide environmental waste. In her assemblage (above, right) she

**Some artists put their messages in the work's frame.**

Neil Jenney, b. 1945. *Acid Story* (1983-84). Oil on wood, 2' 2 1/2" x 11' 8" x 5". Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



**Some artists hide their message in the work itself.**

Jaune Quick to See, b. 1940. *Rainbow* 1989. Oil. 66" x 84". Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, N.Y., N.Y.

rth



makes the point that the bags' carefully planned, sophisticated designs and lettering are seen very briefly. They are then tossed out to end up in "landfills." The shopping bags the artist has chosen advertise intellectual products—magazines and books. This work is

entitled *What Do I Know?* (written in French on one of the bags). Leirner emphasizes the ironic fact that the buyers of these products have probably never considered what will happen when all the landfills are overrun with items like these indestructible plastic bags.

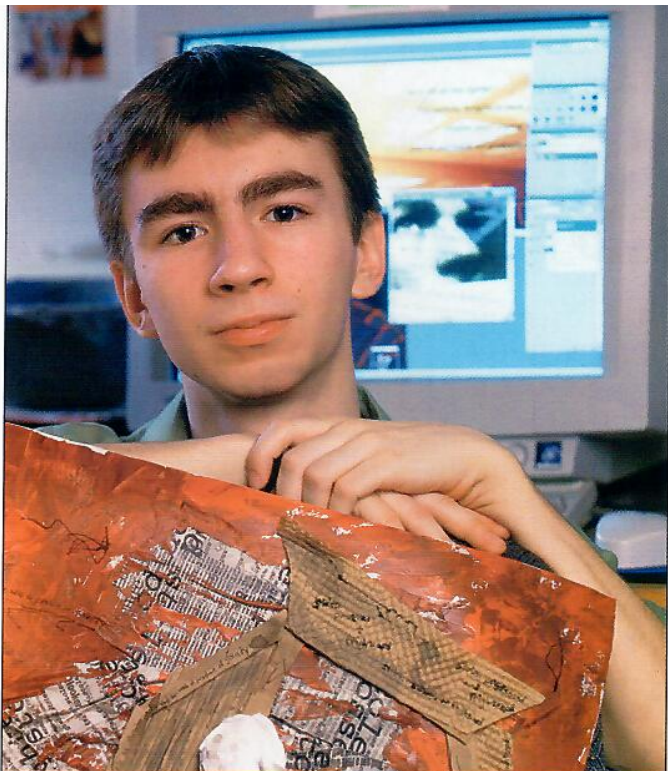
**Some artists build their work of art around its message.**

Jac Leirner, b. 1961. *Que Sais-Je?*, 1993. 51" x 59". Private collection.

## ARTIST OF THE MONTH

# Nathan Martel

**“Through my art, I question what we really need as a society and who controls us as a result of those needs.”**



# Dramatic Messages

The unsettling image on the opposite page is the kind of art 18-year-old Nathan Martel likes to produce. He finds advertising outrageous, and this work is his reaction to it. Nathan created it as a junior at Central York High School in York, Pennsylvania. Now in his first year at Rochester (New York) Institute of Technology, Nathan is taking foundation-art classes and deciding exactly which direction his art career will take.

### **When did you get involved in art?**

I really didn't get seriously interested in art until my junior year in high school. I had always taken art classes, but it was then I realized there were things about my creative process that were working. I was getting better at art. Plus, I knew I had to think about a career after high school. It all started to fall together that

year and it made sense that I should pursue art after graduating.

### **How did you create this work?**

We were assigned to create a picture with a social message. My teacher watched me as he gave the assignment, because he knew I'd like it. I'm really interested in protest and political art.

### **Why is creating political art important to you?**

I think there are a lot of messages that aren't true. My biggest complaint is corporations. Their advertising tells us exactly what we need to survive. We need to wear a certain brand of clothing, to see a particular movie, or eat one kind of fast food or else we'll die. People believe this stuff because they see it over and over. Art is a powerful way to counteract these

messages. Through my art, I question what we need as a society and who controls us because of those needs.

### **Where did you get your idea?**

A couple of times in your life, you suddenly get this great idea. It comes to you like a flash. That's what happened here. I had done a scanning of my face for a friend's art project. Three days later, this idea came to me and I sketched it. The finished product came out just like my sketch, which hardly ever happens to me. It was a rare moment where everything fell together perfectly.

### **How did you create this piece?**

Creating the photo of me came first. My friend wanted a face that looked trapped and helpless. To get a photo, I lay down on a flatbed scanner. She was doing a high-resolution scan, so I couldn't move

Photo © 1999 Tom McKinney

a bit. But it came out really well. The full-size image is incredibly clear.

### **Then what did you do?**

I had taken a picture of a landfill just before we did the scan. The upside-down TV was in there. That gave me the idea to combine the two images on the computer. I scanned the picture of the television and merged it with the picture of myself. For realism, I used Photoshop techniques to reintroduce the curve of the front of the TV and to put in the glare on the screen.

### **How long did it take you?**

If I hadn't been working with an outdated computer, I could probably

have done this in two hours. Photoshop is magical because of the ways it lets you put images together. I was able to get the bevel of the glass back into my face, along with the original ghosting and glare. It's basically a new form of art and I find that very exciting.

### **What do you hope the viewer will get from this piece?**

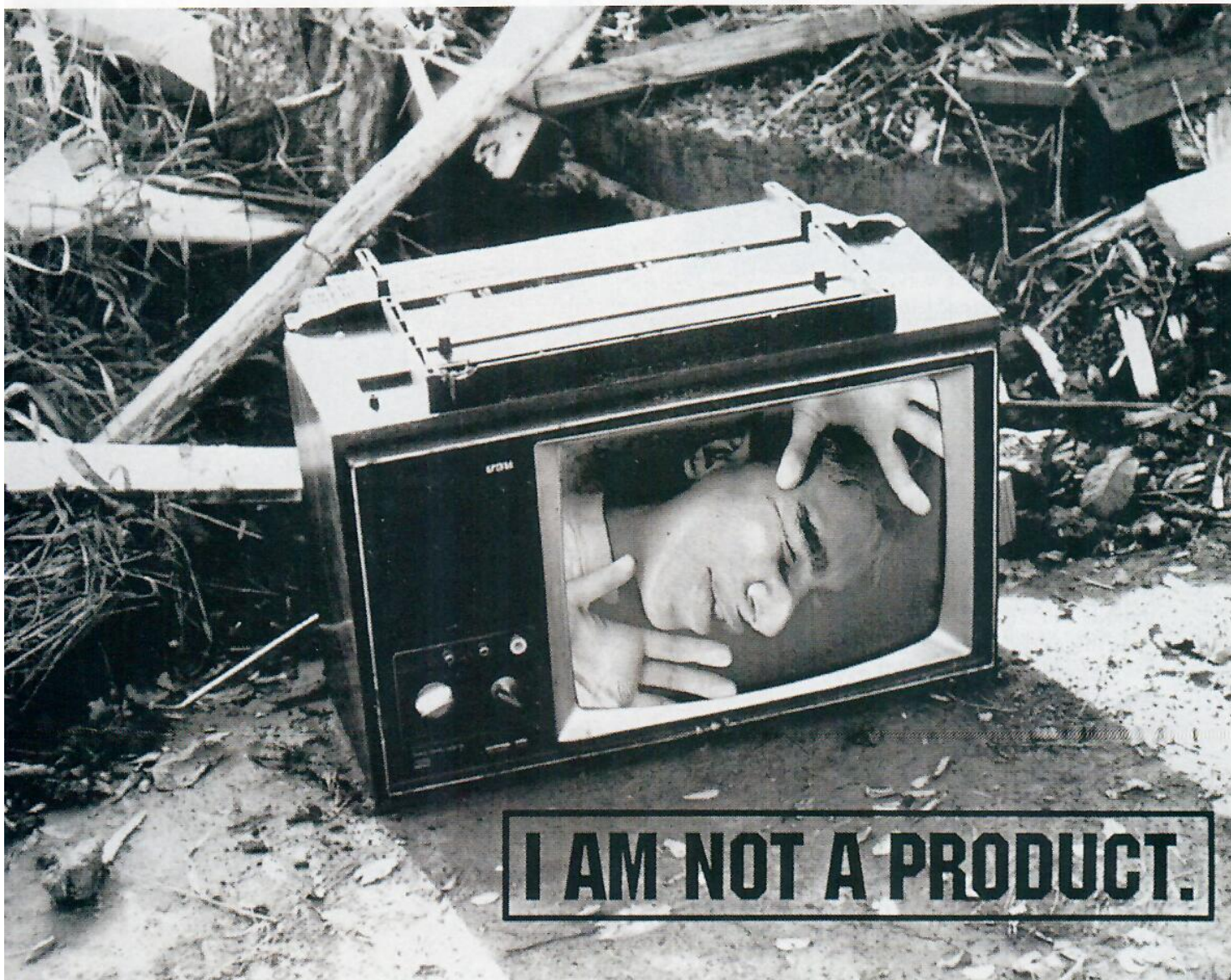
I hope they'll figure out the message for themselves. I intended it to mean that constant exposure to advertising in the media can become confusing. We start to believe we'll become what we buy. I was protesting this by saying I'm an individual with my own thoughts and opinions. I can't be bought or sold.

### **What advice do you have for aspiring artists like yourself?**

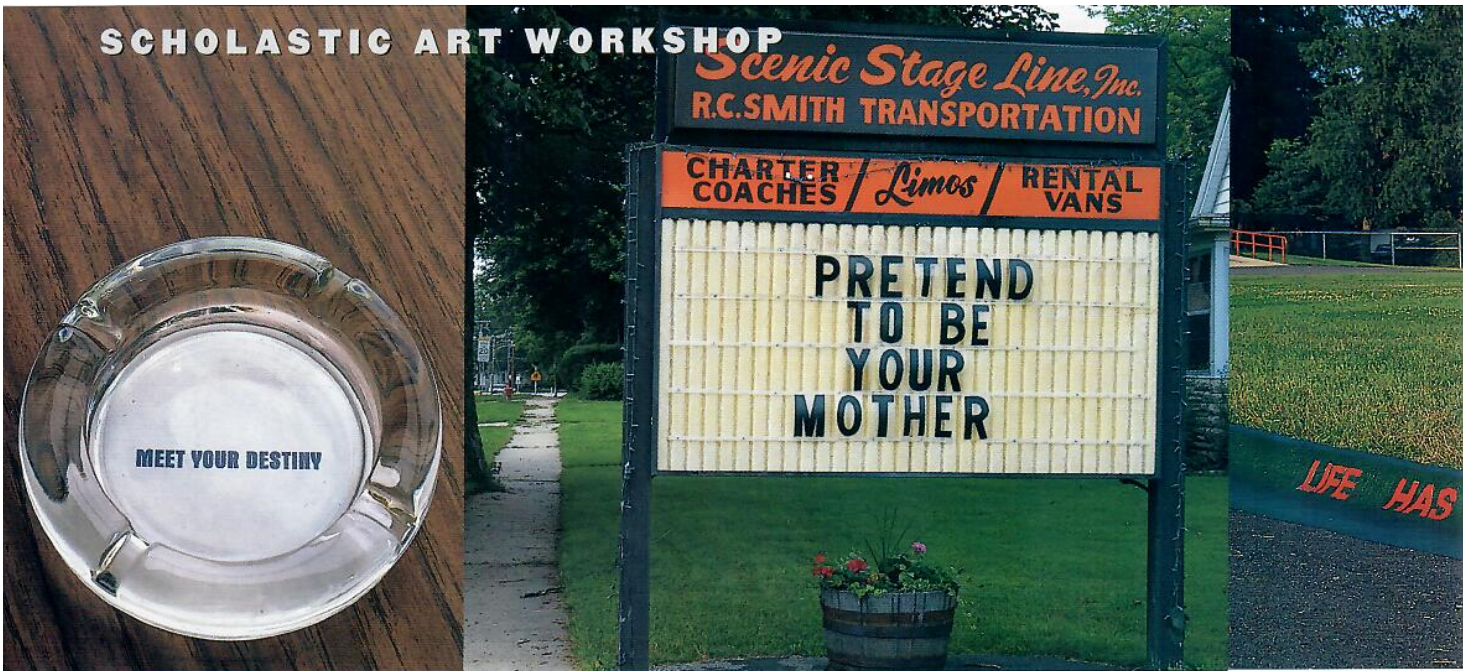
When I was trying to get into art school, I was petrified of portfolio preparation. But everything doesn't have to be an absolute masterpiece. What's important is your potential and your ideas. Concepts should be a huge part of your portfolio. That's one thing I had that others lacked. I'd also urge people to experiment with many different media. Don't be afraid to screw up. That's how you learn.

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*We select our Artist of the Month from among thousands of young art-award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to The Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books.*



## SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP



# Working with

## Create a piece of “conceptual” art.

**M**any conceptual artists use language in their work. Some weave images and letters together. Others use words as art. To make their statements, many conceptual artists use modern technology. They create pieces using neon signs, computer-generated images, electronic signboards, and laser projections. Their work is very different, but they have one thing in common: They all begin with a definite *concept*, which they communicate through their art.

In this workshop, you'll be working with words in unusual ways. And the most important part of the project will be your initial concept.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School. Assisted by Tina M. Bastiani, Northern Illinois University. Photos by Larry Gregory. Conceptual pieces by: Adam J. Swearingen; Joshua C. Gunderlock; Emily A. Schumacher and Allyson A. West; and Matt Stoecker.

### Materials used for the works above

- Glass ash tray
- Chartpack vinyl lettering
- Outdoor display letter sign
- Stencil sets (Helvetica Alphabet, 4" and 8")
- Red, green, white Tru-Test exterior semi-gloss paint
- 80 lb. white sulfite paper
- Assorted paint brushes
- Scissors
- T-shirt
- Permanent black marker
- Camcorder, VCR, and monitor



### Step 1

Begin by jotting down ideas. List issues important to you, phrases you find ironic, words that appeal. Possible topics/themes: social/political issues; war and power; the environment; feminism; gender; class and family structures; friends. Bring ideas to class for discussion. You may work individually or in small groups. Limit messages to eight or fewer words. Consider the audience. Your message should catch people's attention; make viewers think. Personalizing your message gives it impact. Try turning



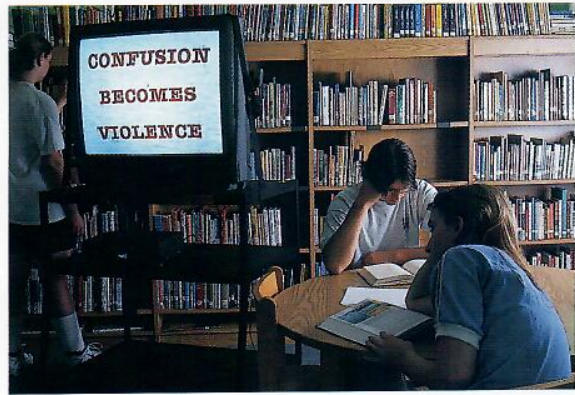
# Words

statements into questions. Use powerful words that provoke strong images. Avoid trite phrases, off-color humor, and words offensive to any individual or group.

## Step 2

Brainstorm potential locations: art room, school, or community. Possible

sites: telephone poles; curbs, steps, sidewalks; want ads; fast-food trays; videotape; T-shirts; buttons; PC screen saver. Select a message that is appropriate for the site. It should also be simple, bold, and visually interesting.



important to avoid misunderstandings and delay. Before executing final work, check spelling and grammar of the words you are using.

## Step 3

Submit a final written, detailed proposal. Include your concept along with support material (specifications, location, drawings, list of materials, contact people). Written permission must be obtained from persons responsible for any site in or around the school or community. Length of time the piece will be up and removal should be included in the proposal. Communication is

## Some Solutions

Which of the solutions above provide insights into an issue? Which make you think twice? In which are surprising statements put in unexpected locations? Why are sidewalks or roads appropriate places for the messages placed there? In which of these concepts are the words the most important element? In which are the locations the most important aspect? In which do words and locations work together to make powerful statements? How does the kind of type used reinforce each message?



# Mysterious Messages

Can you identify these messages and the artists who sent them?

In this issue, you've seen a few of the many inventive ways conceptual artists use words to create art. We've combined details from a few of the pieces that appeared in the magazine. Can you name the artist, identify the artist's message, and explain what the message means?

Write the letter of the work that is most closely associated with each of the phrases or names listed below.



- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Macho behavior is out             | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. We the people                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Projected on a building           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Mike Wilkins                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Another hero                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Barbara Kruger                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Corruption is to be expected      | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Jenny Holzer                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Preamble to the U.S. Constitution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. I am awake                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Comes as no surprise             | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Earth                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. You have to take care of yourself | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Emily Schumacher & Allyson West | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Jenny Holzer                      |