

Vol. 12, No. 6
April/May 1982

art & man

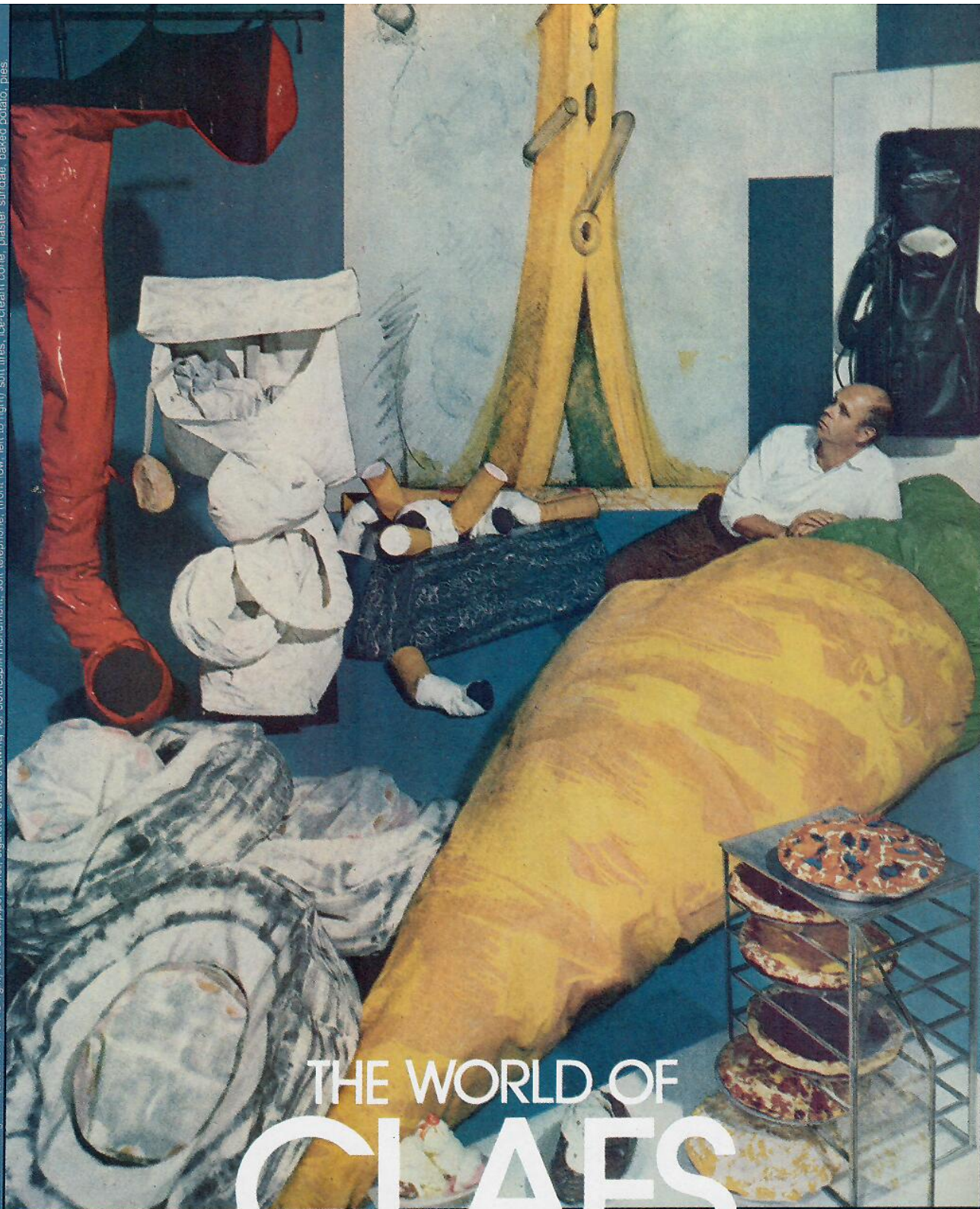
Published by Scholastic under the direction
of the National Gallery of Art



Working with
**EVERYDAY
OBJECTS**

Special
Feature on the
Sculpture of
CLAES OLDENBURG

Claes Oldenburg with (back row, left to right) soft drainpipe, toilet, cigarette butts, drawing for clothespin monument, soft telephone, soft fires, ice-cream cone, plaster, surdæ, baked potato, pies.



THE WORLD OF CLAES OLDENBURG

What can possibly have happened to all of these "everyday" objects?

A

drainpipe, a toilet, an ashtray, a clothespin, a telephone, automobile tires, and an ice-cream cone—could any of these items be more ordinary? But look carefully at the photo on the left and at the giant electric plug on the cover. What is wrong with all these objects? The ice-cream cone is the size of a bed, the telephone and toilet sag and droop, and the shiny, red drainpipe hangs down like an elephant's trunk. These objects are certainly no longer ordinary, but are they art?

This was the question most people asked in the late 1950s, each time they saw a sculpture created by artist Claes Oldenburg. Until then, "art" was fairly easy to identify. While many paintings were not realistic, their designs, colors, and brushstrokes were pleasing to the eye. Sculptures weren't always recognizable; but the beautiful wood, metal, and stone shapes seen in all the museums at that time were clearly "art."

Then in the mid-1950s, "strange and outrageous" things began to appear in some New York art galleries—a real bed with paint all over it, or crushed automobile parts mounted just as a sculpture might be. These were followed by "paintings" of subjects like Campbell's Soup cans, American flags, and comic strips copied right out of the newspapers. But, perhaps, worst of all was the plaster "food" created by a Swedish-American artist named Claes Oldenburg.

In 1961, an art show called "The Store" opened in New York City. Bacon, sides of beef, and roasts hung from the ceiling, and signs and ads covered the walls. There were cases filled with gooey-looking cakes, pies, and ice-cream sodas (such as those shown at the lower right of the photo). But all this "food" was made out of plaster and dripping with bright, garish paint. The art world was outraged. Everyone hated the objects, except for a few critics who began to write about a new art form based on images taken from popular American cul-

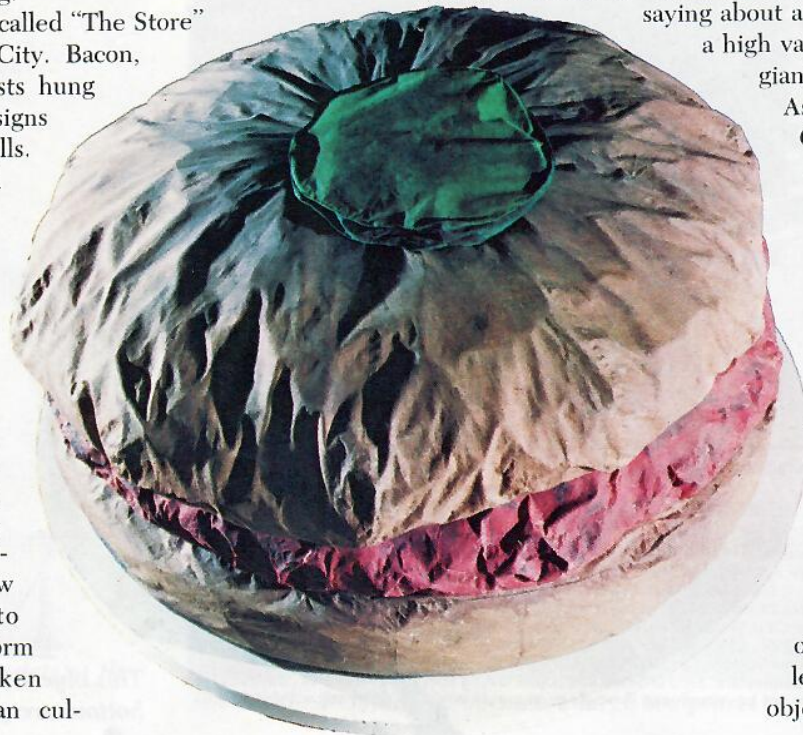
ture. Today, "Pop" art is recognized as one of the most important artistic breakthroughs of the 20th century.

Every so often, a group of artists opens up a new area that was "invisible" before. Renaissance artists were the first to "see" perspective. The Impressionists "discovered" color and light. In the 1950s, everyone saw comic strips, billboards, and advertising. But Pop artists were the first to feel and express the effect that exposure to all this mass media was having on the lives of modern Americans. And one of the most important and inventive of these new artists was Claes Oldenburg.

Oldenburg was born in Stockholm in 1929. His father was a Swedish diplomat, so the family moved constantly from country to country. Feeling he belonged to no culture, Oldenburg invented his own world, a world in which objects were very important. When he was eight, Oldenburg moved to Chicago where he went to school. Later, to make enough to live on, he worked in restaurants and designed costumes for dance companies. Around this time, fast-food places selling hamburgers and French fries were just beginning to be popular. Oldenburg decided to combine all these elements in his art. He took some sailcloth, cut out four circles, sewed them together, stuffed them with foam rubber and created the first soft sculpture, *Giant Hamburger* (below). What do you think of when you see this hamburger which is as big as a person? What might the artist be saying about a society that puts such

a high value on an object like a giant, bloated hamburger?

As you can see, Claes Oldenburg has created a fantasy world of enormous, soft objects. Hard metal gadgets that run our lives and on which we depend—telephones, fans, typewriters—have become huge, limp, and useless. In this issue, you'll see more of Oldenburg's art, meet a young artist working with everyday objects, and then you'll learn to "see" a familiar object in a very new way.

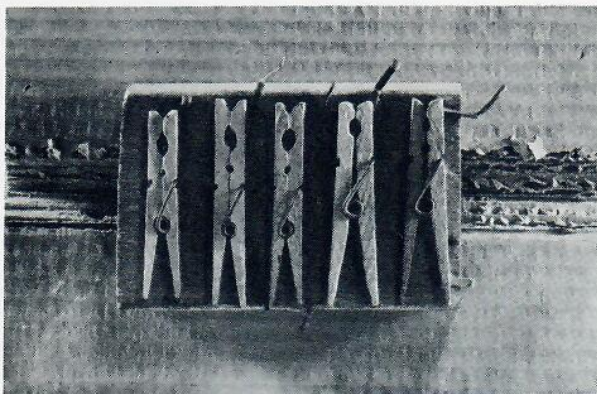


Giant Hamburger, 1962. Painted sailcloth stuffed with foam rubber. 5' high. The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photo by J. Chambers.

“MONUMENTAL” OBJECTS

Are these ordinary clothespins or designs for skyscrapers? Are they art? Read on and find out.

Types of Clothespins, 1967.



These may look like ordinary clothespins, but they are actually sketches for a work of art.

Have you ever walked through a town or city and come upon a statue, a column, a building, or a plaque to commemorate a person or an event? Claes Oldenburg explores every corner of the cities he travels to, sketching all the time. He feels that in today's world, material objects have become much more important than people or memories of the past. Since art should reflect life, a giant scissors (to cut the red tape) should replace the Washington Monument, a memorial in the form of a gigantic fireplug should be built in the middle of Chicago, and the Statue of Liberty should become an enormous fan to cool

Late Submission to the Chicago Tribune Architectural Competition of 1922: Clothespin, 1967.



This object was designed to be a building (bottom are people).

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New Yorkers in the summer.

Oldenburg has always used objects rather than human figures to convey his thoughts and feelings, "What I see is not the object, but myself in it." All his objects *remind* us of figures, or parts of figures. A soft black fan is funny and *suggests* many human qualities, but a sculpture of a crumpled, black figure would be frightening. What else might Oldenburg be suggesting about modern society and its values in his monument projects?

Oldenburg began turning his favorite objects into "monuments" in 1965, the year he moved into his new studio in New York City. From his windows, he could look out over the whole skyline. Everything looked as small as the objects he was always drawing. But, like most creative thoughts, the "monument" idea had many sources. If you look at magazine

and newspaper ads, you'll see that many of them feature huge objects set in a vast landscape. And to these "Pop" art images, Claes Oldenburg added his own fantastic point of view. To Oldenburg, the problems of the cities seemed so overwhelming—crime, pollution, overcrowding, traffic—that only unreasonable, childlike solutions made sense. Could anything but a huge bowling ball get through New York City traffic? A giant, shiny toilet bowl floating on the Thames river would supply Londoners with reflected sunlight. And only a gigantic clothespin could withstand the strong winds of Chicago. "When I flew to Chicago, I took along an old-fashioned wooden clothespin because I liked its shape. I stuck the clothespin in a wad of gum and placed it on the little table in front of my seat. As our plane flew over Chicago, I noticed that

the buildings down there looked the size of the clothespin."

The ideas behind the monuments may be funny, but the structures themselves are very seriously presented. Oldenburg makes architectural diagrams, blueprints, plans, perspectives, and scale models of each. Every detail is thought of. "The area under the legs of the Colossal Clothespin is a huge wind tunnel, with blue glass lining the inside. The rod of the 'spring' in the middle of the building would be glassed in and contains a restaurant."

Only a few of Oldenburg's monuments have actually been built, such as this 45-foot concrete clothespin in Philadelphia (*below*). How does the real version compare with the drawing below, on the left? Which do you like better? Which do you think is more important to the artist, the idea or the actual sculpture?

Collection of Charles Cowles, New York.



over 35 stories tall (the black dots at the

Clothespin, 1977. Steel, 45' high. Centre Square, Philadelphia. Photo Leo Castelli Gallery.



The finished clothespin became a large sculpture.

MAGIC OBJECTS

Find out how three other artists have transformed ordinary “everyday” objects.



Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). *Still Life with Peppermint Bottle*, 1890. National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection.

A NEW REALITY

The 19th-century French painter Paul Cézanne worked with objects as ordinary as those used by Claes Oldenburg—apples, bottles, cups and saucers. Both artists turned their objects into simple, geometric shapes. In the still life above, the glass is a cone, the bottle necks are cylinders, and the apples are circles. Compare these shapes to Claes Oldenburg’s sculptures on page 2. Can you find a cone, cylinders, or circles?

Oldenburg presents a single, gigantic object,

humanizes it and makes us see it in a new way. Cézanne also wanted to make us see a new reality, but his was the reality of his paintings. He was not interested in the objects themselves but in the relationships between them. Look at the way he has tilted the large bottle, squashed the apples, and flattened the tablecloth (does it look at all as though it is lying on the table?). The forms of the objects and the spaces between them were the reality that interested Cézanne.

FANTASTIC OBJECTS

You've already seen what changing only one aspect of an everyday object can do. Claes Oldenburg's clothespins on pages 4-5 are very ordinary except for one thing—their size. What single element has Swiss Surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim changed in her most famous sculpture *Object*, right? She has taken one of the most ordinary groups of household objects—a teacup, saucer, and spoon—and shocked nearly all of our senses—sight, touch, taste—by covering them with fur.

The Surrealists, a group of European artists working in the 1920s and 30s, wanted to create a private reality based on dreams, fears, and inner feelings. In Surrealist art, objects float, grow limp, shrink, or change into something else. What does a fur-covered teacup remind you of? Does it give you a happy or an anxious, creepy feeling?

Meret Oppenheim (b. 1913).
Object, 1936. Museum of
Modern Art, NY., Purchase.



HAUNTED PLACES

Sometimes artists transform ordinary objects by giving them human or animal qualities. Sometimes the objects themselves don't change at all, but their surroundings do. In *The Diner*, contemporary American sculptor George Segal has put together some very real objects—a counter, stools, a coffee machine, some cups and spoons. We probably wouldn't look twice at all these things if Segal hadn't added two other items. A couple of ghostly, white plaster figures inhabit this life-sized dream world. These rough, unfinished "people" have nothing to do with one another. In fact, they don't really even seem to be there. The objects and settings in Segal's sculptures—the colorful chromium and neon lights of his movie theaters, waiting rooms, and gas stations—seem to be more real and alive than the pale, white ghosts that wander through them.

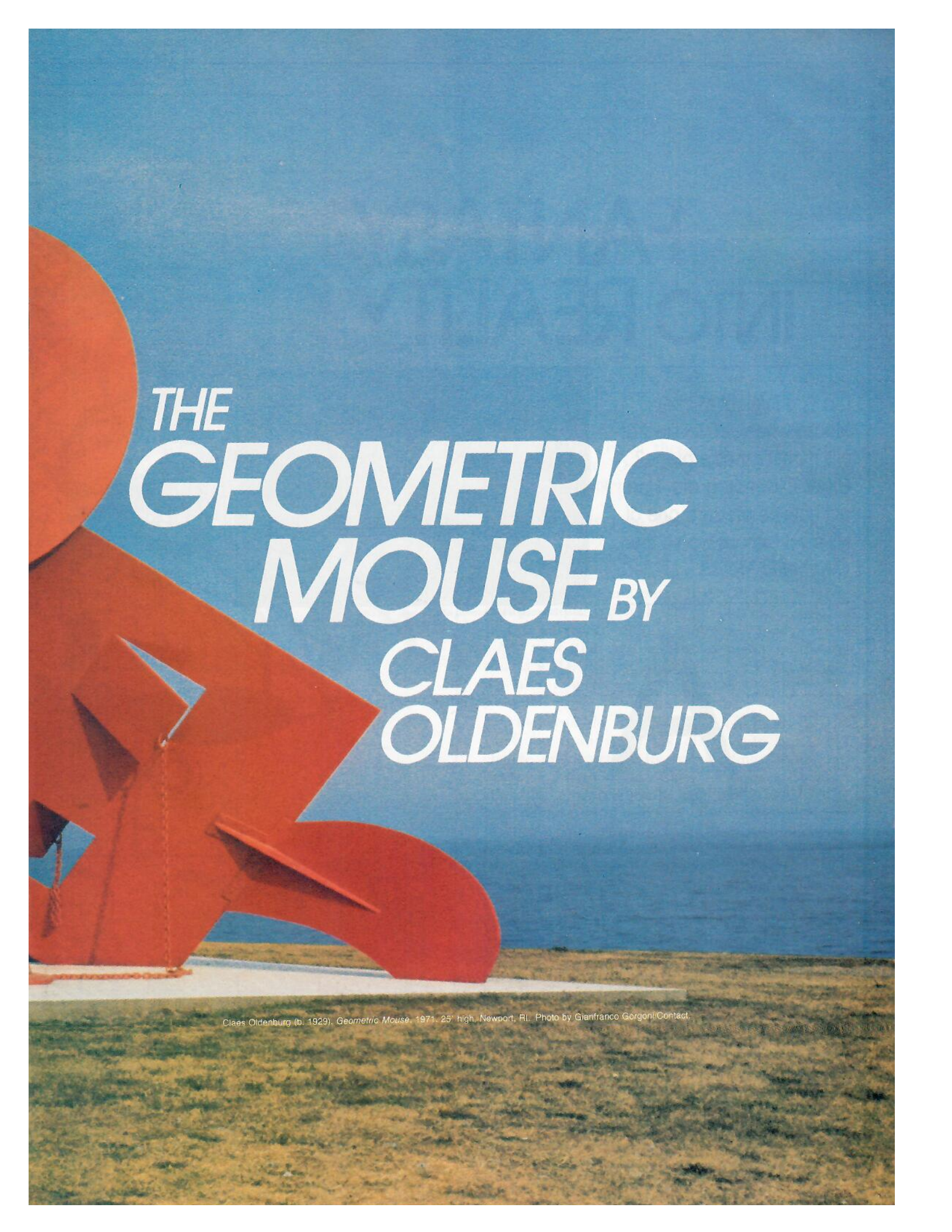
George Segal (b. 1924). *The Diner*, 1964-1966. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, Gift of the T.B. Walker Foundation.





art & man

Masterpiece of the Month 6

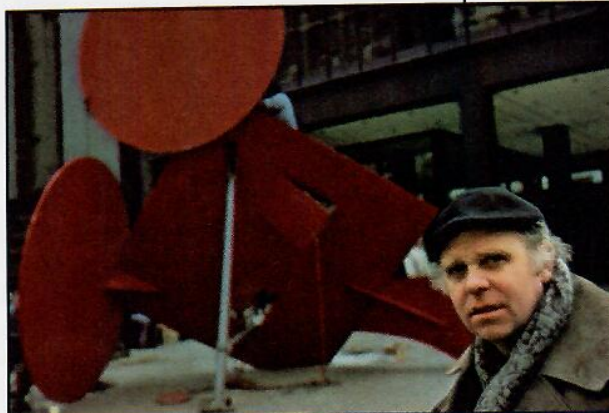


THE
GEOMETRIC
MOUSE BY
CLAES
OLDENBURG

Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929), *Geometric Mouse*, 1971, 25' high, Newport, RI. Photo by Gianfranco Gorgoni/Contact.

FANTASY INTO REALITY

Did you think of Mickey Mouse when you looked at this month's masterpiece? Claes Oldenburg did. Find out how he created one of his most famous works, the *Geometric Mouse*.



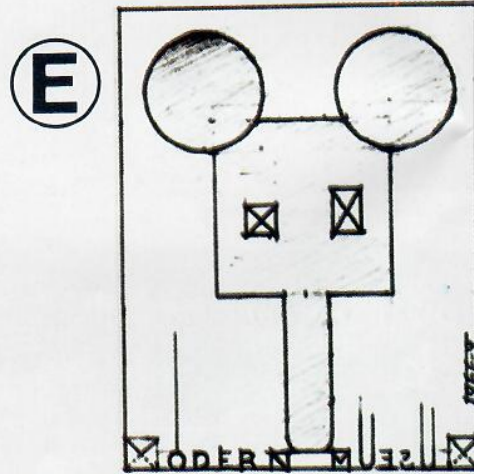
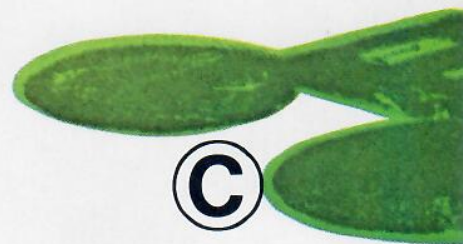
Claes Oldenburg and *Geometric Mouse*, New York City, 1980. Gianfranco Gorgoni/Contact.



A

As you have seen, artist Claes Oldenburg uses everyday objects the way other artists might use the human figure. And many of the subjects he chooses are also self-portraits. Mickey Mouse has been one of Oldenburg's favorite objects since the artist was a boy. "Mickey Mouse is one of the most important American symbols. I made Mickey a geometric shape because of his relationship with the early movie camera. The 'eyes' operate as shutters, which I have represented as old-fashioned window shades (notice the chains hanging from each of the 'eyes' of the sculptures). Such shades never roll up, which accounts for the sleepy look. One side of the 'face' shows the mouse's kindly aspect; the other, his brutal one. The body is included in the face—the tongue doubles as a heart and a foot." In these notes, Oldenburg is talking about Mickey Mouse, but who else might he be referring to?

Claes Oldenburg never stops creating. When he



A page from Oldenburg's "idea" files.



"Mouse" notes, 1968. Owned by the artist.

isn't sketching, which is nearly all the time, he is writing in his diary. He tries to read every newspaper and magazine, cutting out everything that interests him. He pastes all these drawings, writings, and clippings into notebooks, labeling the date and place of each. From these "idea" files, certain themes emerge. One image will remind him of another and trigger memories of more objects from the past.

Look at this page from one of Oldenburg's sketchbooks (left). It shows the artist's random thoughts on the theme of Mickey Mouse. "Originally the *Geometric Mouse* was to be (A) the front of a modern art museum. It could also be a (B) hilltop sculpture (which will fall and change shape as it rolls down the hill). It might also appear as (C) a city park (the eyes serving as swimming pools) and as a (D) floating sculpture. Later the mouse was used as a (E) letterhead and so became a self-portrait.

When you do the workshop on pages 14-15, you'll be trying to think of ways to creatively change an object or its surroundings so that it becomes a work of art. Claes Oldenburg has created over 5,000 different *Geometric Mouse* sculptures. They vary in size and weight from inch-high cardboard mice to towering mouse monuments weighing several tons. Oldenburg has made mouse banners which flap in the breeze, mouse kites which fly, and foam mice which weigh nothing. He has made bent mice by "dropping them from a plane or rolling them down a mountain." Some are invisible, "buried in someone's attic." Can you picture how these mouse sculptures would look? Do you think Oldenburg is serious about them all?

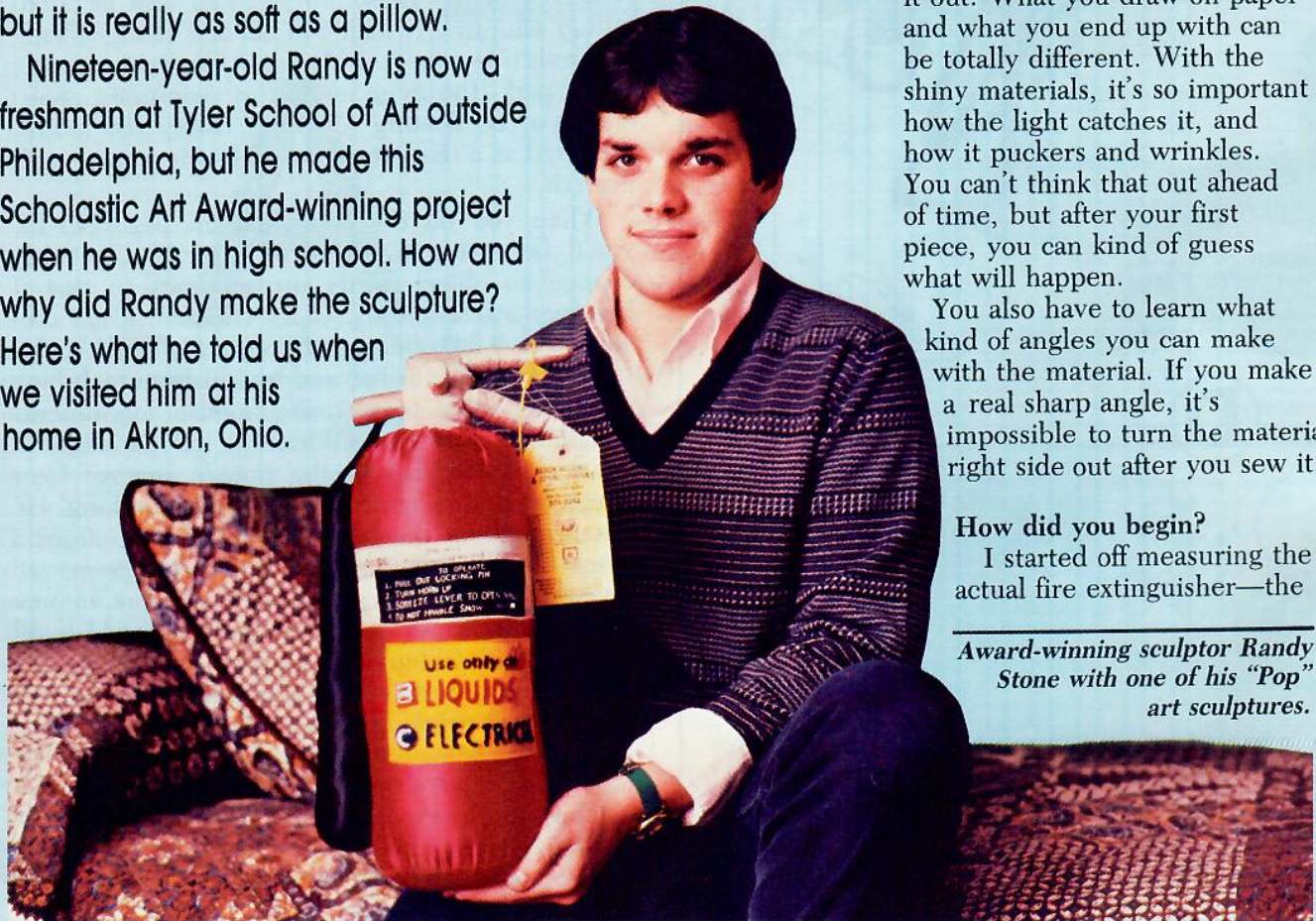
Oldenburg says about this month's masterpiece, the red *Geometric Mouse*, built on a beach overlooking the Atlantic Ocean: "A field of *Geometric Mice* will outlast us all—like the mysterious heads looking out to sea on Easter Island. Later visitors to this planet will wonder what purpose these figures served—if they were things or portraits or gods."

RANDY STONE: SCULPTOR

When you first see

Randy Stone's fire extinguisher, you look—and then you look again. It's the same size and shape as a real fire extinguisher, but it is really as soft as a pillow.

Nineteen-year-old Randy is now a freshman at Tyler School of Art outside Philadelphia, but he made this Scholastic Art Award-winning project when he was in high school. How and why did Randy make the sculpture? Here's what he told us when we visited him at his home in Akron, Ohio.



How did you get the idea for this work?

It started off as a joke. I was looking around my classroom, and I saw the fire extinguisher hanging on the wall. I was planning to do a soft sculpture so I said jokingly, I'll do the fire extinguisher. But then I started thinking about it, and it became a mind-teaser in a way, figuring out how I would do it. I knew it would be difficult with all the knobs and funny little things at the top.

How was it done? Did you have to learn how to sew?

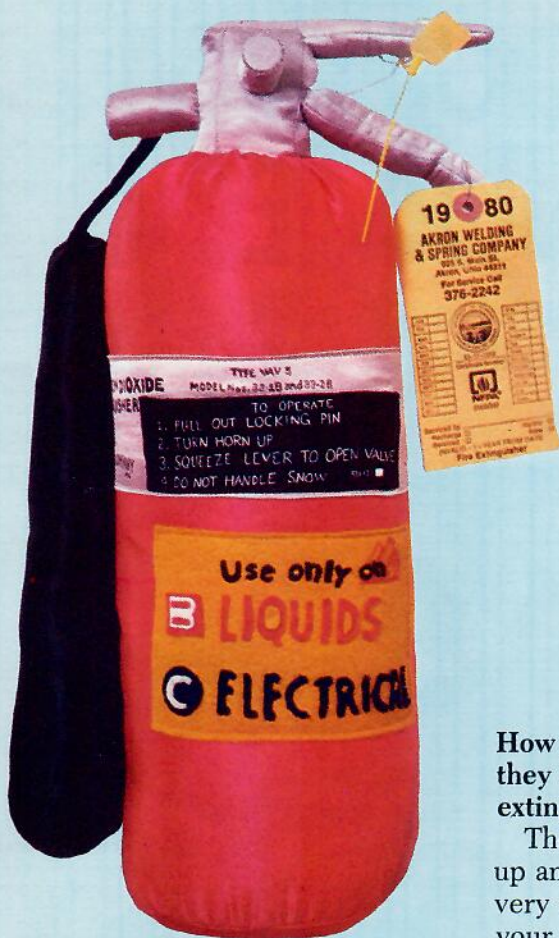
It's all sewing, but in the 7th grade everyone had to take sewing so I already knew how to use a machine. And then in my junior year I did a cloud and lightning bolt in soft sculpture. That gave me an introduction to using the materials and planning it out. What you draw on paper and what you end up with can be totally different. With the shiny materials, it's so important how the light catches it, and how it puckers and wrinkles. You can't think that out ahead of time, but after your first piece, you can kind of guess what will happen.

You also have to learn what kind of angles you can make with the material. If you make a real sharp angle, it's impossible to turn the material right side out after you sew it.

How did you begin?

I started off measuring the actual fire extinguisher—the

Award-winning sculptor Randy Stone with one of his "Pop" art sculptures.



diameter of the tube, the width of the metal band, etc. My goal was to make it as exact as possible. I almost did the yellow tag in soft sculpture, but I decided it would be better with the real tag there. If you look at the sculpture from a distance, it kind of fools you for a minute—you think it's the real thing.

Why did you want to make it the same size?

I think it's funnier that way. It's like all the other fire extinguishers in the school, which are all the exact same size. It was so tempting to go hang it on one of the real hooks in the hall.

Did you run into any problems?

The hardest part was the top. I had to break it down into

basic geometric shapes—and then I had to put it all together. The locking pin I discovered was impossible in soft sculpture. So I found some metallic thread and shoved a piece of wire down the middle to give it shape.

I enjoy all these little details. I must have spent a month working on it—at school and when I got home at night. A lot of the time was on-the-job failure and figuring up how to make up for it. I redid the handles a couple of times.

How do people react when they first see the fire extinguisher?

They laugh. You want to go up and squeeze it because it's very soft and pillowy. It's like your grandmother coming up and pinching your cheek when you were a little kid.

You're in art school now. How did you choose art as a career?

It was a really hard decision. I almost went into pre-med, which would have been a big mistake because I don't think that way. The summer after my junior year I went to a career counselor in Cleveland. I like art, but one of my major concerns was the stereotype of the starving artist. But the counselor had facts about art. There are a lot of opportunities out there. My main interest was design. Like anything else, you have to work at it, but it's possible to do well and make a very good living.

How did you choose Tyler

School of Art?

My senior high art teacher helped me tremendously. She helped me get together my portfolio, and figure out what I wanted in a school.

I chose Tyler for its size, location, and its program. At a smaller school, I'm not a number—I feel they care about me. And it's located outside of Philadelphia, so I'm not far from museums in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington.

What did you like about Tyler's program?

It's known more as a drawing and painting school—with a good foundation program. It was important to me not to go to a school where I took design classes from Day 1. It makes me more confident about being in design, because I've tried the other things.

Is there any advice you could offer our readers on choosing a career?

It's hard. I found that the school counselors weren't very helpful. I discovered there was a huge art field they seemed to be totally missing. I was lucky my parents could afford an outside counselor.

My main advice would be to talk to people—art teachers, counselors, anyone you can find. And maybe from all this, you can sort something out. But you have to look hard. You have to find what's most comfortable for *you*, and you have to go with your own gut reactions. All I can say is, I'm much happier and I don't dread getting up in the morning the way I did for physics class in high school. I enjoy going to art classes. Art gives me satisfaction. It allows me to be my own person.

CREATING YOUR OWN MONUMENT

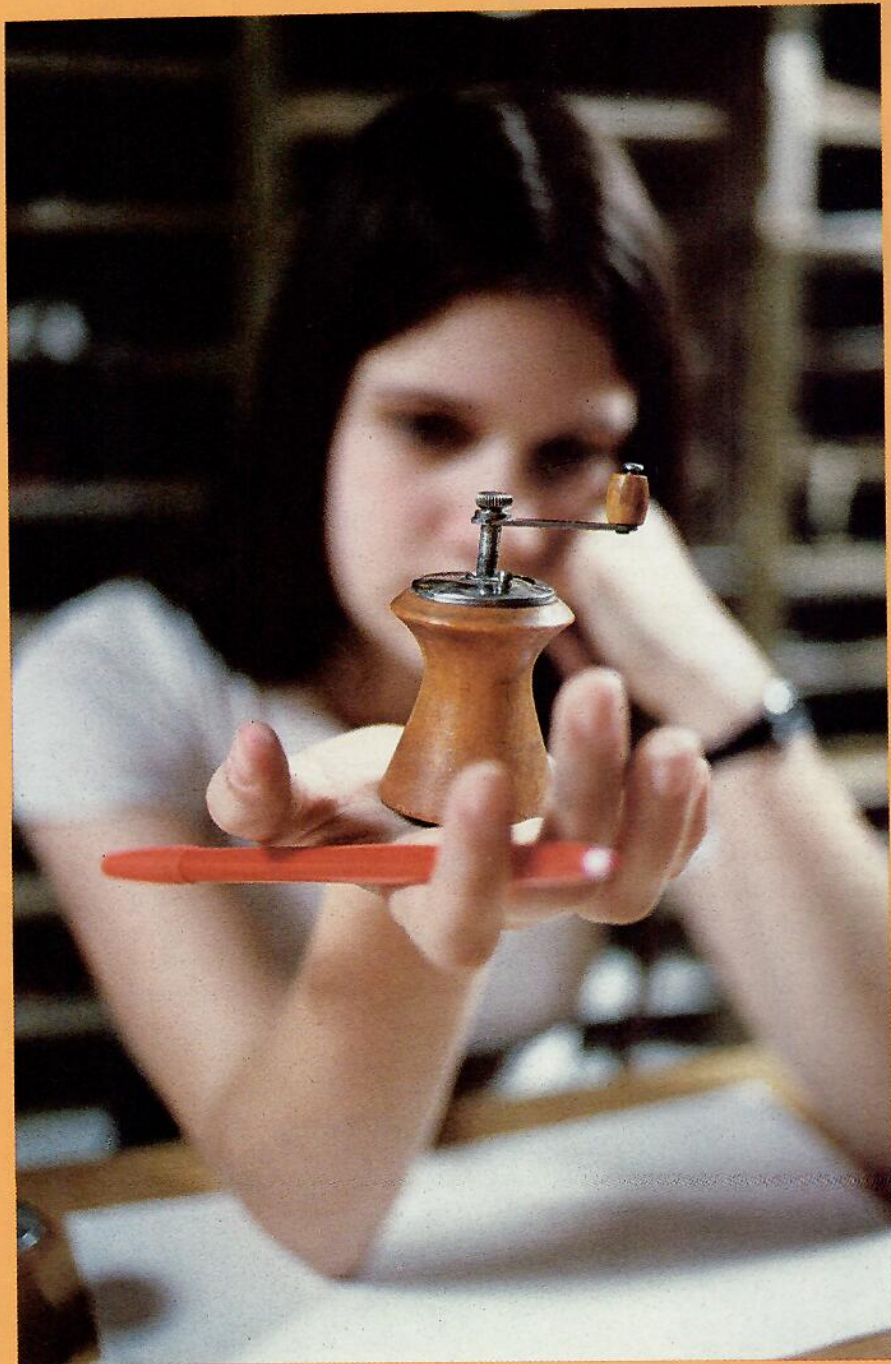
Do you have a favorite object—a lucky penny or a pen knife? Find out how to turn it into a “monument.”

Monuments usually pay tribute to a person or an event. Surely you've seen statues in parks honoring great soldiers and statesmen. But have you ever seen a monument that is a giant flashlight or an umbrella? These are the kind of large sculptures Claes Oldenburg creates. They are huge and made to last like other monuments in public places. But rather than honoring a person or an event, they celebrate the shapes and designs of everyday objects.

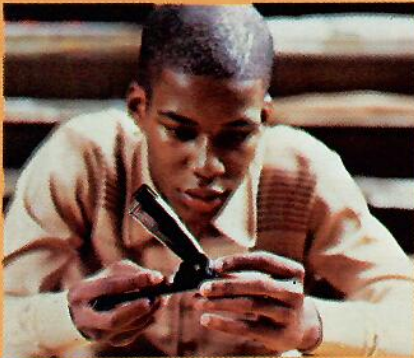
In many cases, Oldenburg has been commissioned to construct a piece for a specific location. After thinking about the place, he designs an appropriate monument. He starts with an object, like a clothespin, which appeals to him, and then he becomes familiar with its form. He works with the shape—making sketches and building scale models that explore its possibilities at the site. In creating our own monuments, we will work the other way around. We will start with the object and then create the environment we think should surround it.

MATERIALS

You will need white paper, cardboard or Bristol board, and markers.



STARTING OUT



1. Select a small, simple object. Before drawing, carefully examine your object. Turn it around, notice its shape, how it is put together, how it works.

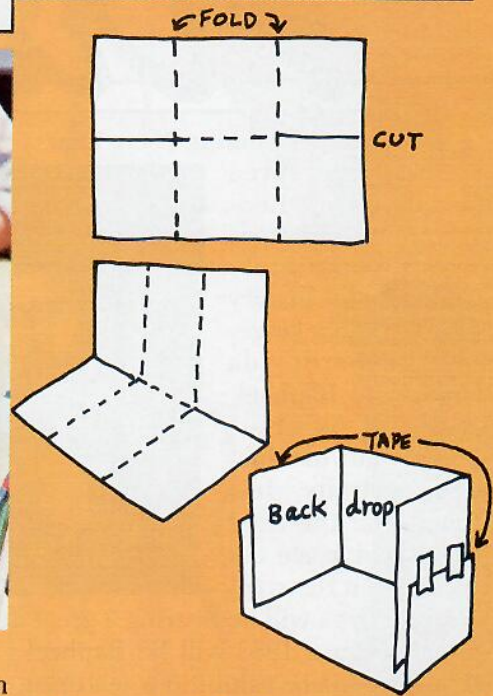


Photos by Richard Hutchings.



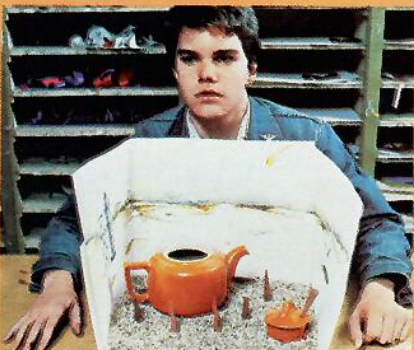
2. Now make lots of quick sketches. Sketch the object from different angles. As you sketch, focus on the design of the object. How is it put together? Try to forget that it has any function. Make a contour sketch. Draw the negative space around the object.

4. Now, imagine your object as a huge form—so large that to see both sides you'd have to walk around it. It can no longer perform the function it did when it was small; it is only a vast form with a certain shape. Assuming you can place your monumental form anywhere, try to imagine a good environment for it. Create this location on a backdrop which can be attached to the rear of your "shadowbox." The object can be placed anywhere in the shadowbox.

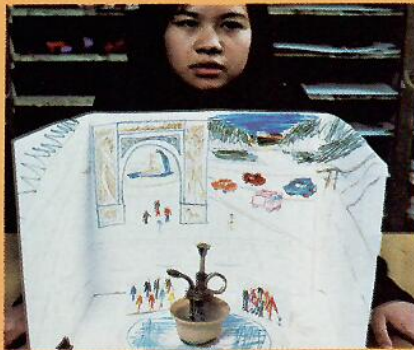


3. Next, build a three-dimensional background from stiff cardboard or Bristol board. Make it large enough so that your object is completely surrounded.

SOME SOLUTIONS



Your object can be set in a familiar place or a strange, forbidding one. This orange teapot has landed in a deserted landscape. Spikes sticking out of the sand separate the pot and lid. Stand-up forms can add to your setting.



Detail will make your environment more real. A large city square with streets, an arch, and people is the perfect place for this ornate monument—the top of a spray can set in a pot. Does it remind you of anything else?



If your object has moving parts, how do you want to use them? Set in this watery-blue environment, what does this wide-open stapler look like? The angles of the stapler's jaws are repeated in the jagged line of waves in front.

Arts Alive

Coming Next Year

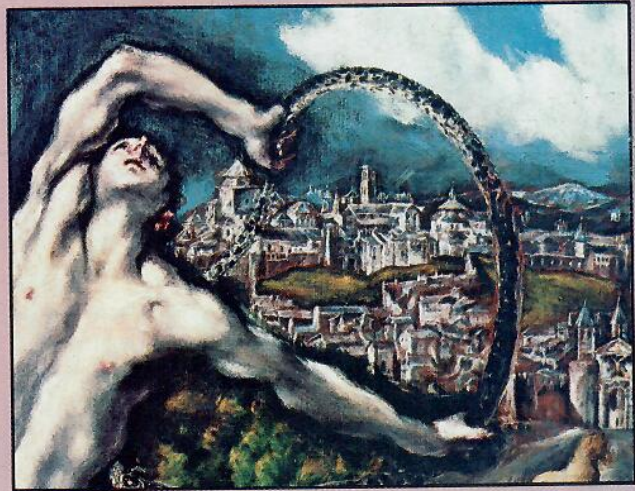
There are three famous Italian Renaissance masters who completely changed the history of art—Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael. Raphael is best known for his lifelike portraits, like the one at the right of a Renaissance nobleman. In the coming year, you will be hearing a great deal about this artist because 1983 will be Raphael's 500th birthday. Two major exhibitions featuring works by this Renaissance master have already been planned. *Art from the Vatican Collections*, containing nearly 200 works never before seen in the U.S., including many by Raphael, will open in New York next fall. It will then travel to various cities throughout the country. The National Gallery in Washington, DC, is also preparing a large Raphael show scheduled to open early in 1983. You will be able to prepare for these events, by reading the Sept./Oct. 1982 issue of *Art & Man*. It will be all about Raphael, his life and times, his most famous portraits, and will feature many other articles on "The Art of Painting People."



Raphael Sanzio (1483-1520). *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, 1516. Louvre, Paris.

Twin Cities

What do Toledo, Ohio and Toledo, Spain have in common? In addition to their name, both will soon be sharing the artwork of the famous Spanish painter El Greco. This 16th-century artist left his native Greece and moved to Toledo, Spain. He immortalized this city in many of his paintings, like the one below. You can see over 70 of El Greco's works, many shown for the first time in this country, in *El Greco of Toledo* opening July 3 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. After closing on Sept. 6, it will then travel to the Toledo, Ohio, Museum of Art (Sept. 26-Nov. 21), and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (Dec. 12-Feb. 6, 1983).



Domenikos Theotokopoulos, called "El Greco" (1541-1614). *Laocoön* (detail), 1610. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Samuel Kress Collection.

More Pop Art

As you look at this painting, what do you notice first? Probably it is the big, bold *Standard* sign and the eye-catching trademarks on the gas pumps. During the 1960s, Claes Oldenburg sculpted the everyday objects that surround us. Other "Pop" artists like Edward Ruscha began painting the ordinary signs, ads, and billboards that crowd city landscapes. In fact, Ruscha's paintings, with their simple compositions, emphasis on words, and artificial colors, began to look like ads. You can see more of Ruscha's Pop art paintings now, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (until May 23). This large show will then travel to the Whitney Museum, NY (July 8-Sept. 5), the Vancouver Art Gallery (Oct. 4-Nov. 28), The San Antonio Museum of Art (Dec. 27-Feb. 20, 1983), and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (March 17-May 15, 1983).

Edward Ruscha (b. 1937). *Standard Station*, 1966. Show sponsored by Philip Morris, Inc. and the National Endowment of the Arts.

