

## CONSTRUCTS AND ANIMALS



Sharon Wybrants, Untitled, 1978  
Courtesy Organization of Independent Artists. Photo Gigi Franklin.

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**C**onstructs, a museum-scale show of 55 artists, registered the presence of a direction spanning two different movements from its base and anchor, the wall. *Animals*, an extravaganza featuring 26 artists, was designed to "acquaint the general public with works with a higher degree of imagery than is usually associated with contemporary art" (which for the most part took the form of zoo animals). The Organization of Independent Artists (O.I.A.) is the common link between these two art events—events because both exhibitions in their different ways transcend the concept of an ordinary group show. Both offered arguments for a way of seeing. *Constructs*, addressed to the art world proper, put on notice that since the mid Sixties (which, to my mind, omits Robert Rauschenberg's 1950s wall pieces) the reality of the wall as a painting space has been an increasingly important factor in Amer-

ican art. *Animals*, offered to the general public at the World Trade Center and stemming from the idea of mythological parade animals and animals as a social image, "was an attempt to pull together a wide range of artists, who are really isolated, and give them an opportunity to work with people of similar sensibility." One more similarity between these shows is that they were both curated by artists—specifically by Eliot Lable and Joseph Strand.

"The addition of sculptural elements into painting in all degrees or, in essence, the concrete working with the illusion is the theme of *Constructs* as I see it," Lable says; "the concrete being the sculptural part is the real, the illusion is the painting part—what painting introduces." This very consciously loose and open description of *Constructs* offers a bewildering number of possibilities ranging from Cubist collages to assemblages of the '50s. The work chosen for this show, however, differs more radically from the Collage than the Assemblage school. Most of the pieces were built to stand out from the wall, and many of them contained real sculptural elements. The fact that in more than half of them, the illusionary, painting element was equally present would seem to strengthen Lable's position that *Constructs* constitutes at least a growing direction, if not a fully grown-

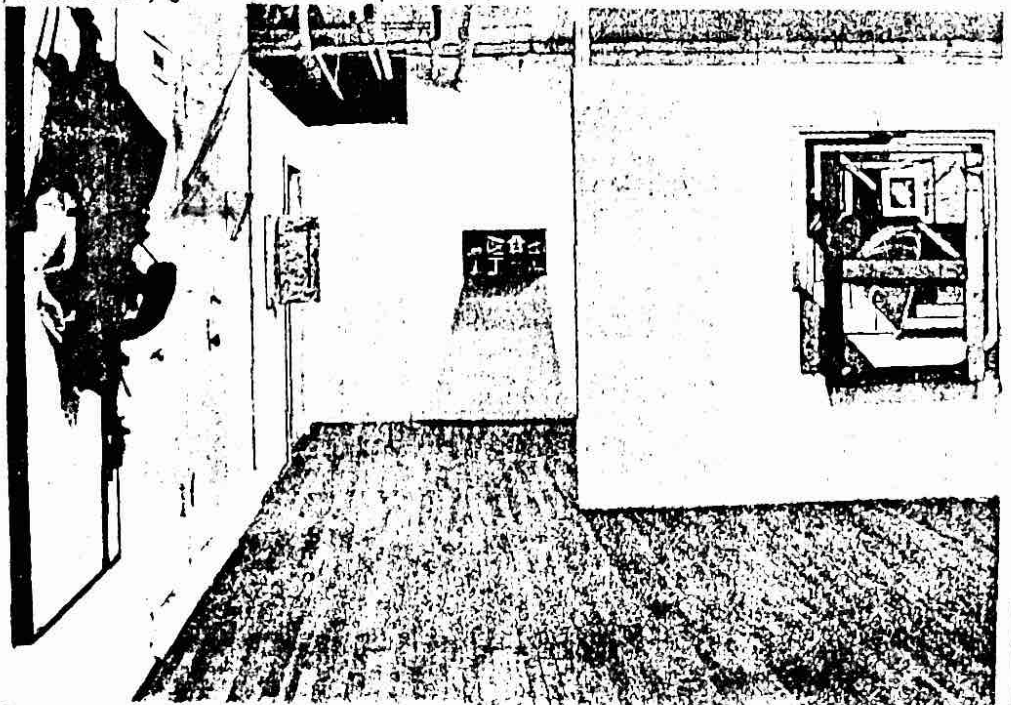
up movement, among a good three dozen artists. In the show itself (inclusionary and eclectic in keeping with the style it champions), two very distinct approaches to the painting and making of wall pieces became evident. There were the 'minimally painted structures like Tony Vanderperk's long bar, Charles Hinman's beige and white wall piece, and Paul Rotterdam's dark, built-out painting as opposed to the elaborately painted, many parted, built-up works of such artists as Bill Alpert, Stuart Diamond, and Eliot Lable. Barbara Schwartz's pair of protruding, curved horn shapes in terms of their heavily painted surfaces would also seem to belong to the latter category.

A not too impressive piece by Eva Hesse was sensibly included as a pioneer work in the area of wall pieces in general, and there were unclassifiable art objects such as Nancy Grossman's leather wall collage, Linda Benglis' silver knot, and Loren Madsen's handsome *Lead Shot Piece* made of lead shot, thread, and nails—in all of these, painting was either non-existent or beside the point. But the very broadness of the show was perhaps its strength. *Constructs* managed to deliver works by artists "ranging from bright new talents to current leaders of the art world." And, maybe because it raised so many new and old questions, *Constructs*

seems to have been a pivotal event, one whose influence may still be with us into the Eighties.

By contrast, *Animals* was an exhibition to be enjoyed, shuddered over and laughed at on the spot, a show with an air of nostalgia about it harking back to the Judson Church performances and the free-floating exuberance of the Sixties. The huge gorilla holding the naked man by Sharon Wybrants was the show's *pièce de résistance*. On a more sober level, there was Gillian Bradshaw-Smith's stuffed elephant truck and a Luis Jimenez fiberglass sculpture, together with dragon masks contributed by the Chinese Youth Association, Gigi Franklin's teddy bears, and Joseph Strand's several animal pieces, not the least of which was a diorama consisting of a stuffed fox and an upright, clawing tiger (both on loan from the American Museum of Natural History) poised in front of the artist's own fiberglass, feather-coated, red wing sculpture (contributed by the Louis K. Meisel Gallery). The *Animals* exhibition mixed art world flora and fauna and art with the museum's own artifacts in a way that managed to undermine the rather staid environment of the World Trade Center's Custom House lobbies. It also managed to give a lot of people pleasure in the process.

Corinne Robins



Installation (Constructs), 1978