

offer a credible reproach to the downtrodden; after all, if you didn't like your lot in life, you could go west and stake your own claim under the banner of manifest destiny.

During the last twenty-five years, however, all of these bets have been called off. A new generation of oppositional scholars have exposed the myths, and have pointed to their almost nonexistent basis in the political and economic facts of our times. These partisans of the new post-formalist theory have taken the notion of the historical avant-garde at its word, and argued persuasively for a reinsertion of the rhetoric of class politics (exemplified by the notion of the artwork as the self-conscious component of a signifying system rather than an autonomous presence) into an aesthetic debate that had grown feeble on a clichéd cult of self-expression that already was divorced by political argument from the notion of technique.

At this moment, the main ideological problem in the visual arts is the tension between the two notions of what the term "avant-garde" can be taken to mean: oppositional politics, or a fashion-based notion of innovation and "progress." Art Education rides precariously on the horns of this dilemma.

Even as the realm of theory asks the artist to take on a politicized sense of purpose (at precisely a time when viable antagonistic politics have collapsed into globally scaled factionalism), the realm of practice insists upon the primacy of a self-expression without having any insight into the changing nature of the emblematic self that is supposed to be doing the expressing. The self that is implicitly sanctified in the realm of Art Education is the narcissistically conceived self, the self propelled by a misguided anger over the injury that is done when the individual gains knowledge of the world while growing evermore ineffectual as an agent of controlling that world. The self that now needs to be sanctified is the one that trusts and celebrates its own depth of feeling, not from the standpoint of announcing its "specialness" in a depersonalized world, but from the standpoint of projecting models of relevant psychic integration so as to enable both the artist and the viewer to psychically withstand the inevitability of socioeconomic depersonalization. Currently, neither Art Theory (which is invested in the ideologically

determined self) nor Art Practice (which is invested in the narcissistically conceived self) is offering relevant answers to the vexing questions that pertain to the current state of Art Education—hence the current quagmire of lost sense of purpose.

It has been more than twenty years since Gregory Battcock edited the anthology of essays *New Ideas in Art Education*, and needless to say, they are no longer new. In fact, they all quite gently tap dance around the antagonistic confusion that I described above, apparently in the hope that Theory and Practice could and indeed *would* learn to live together as one, as if it might somehow come to pass as a historic inevitability. I say that the time has come to advance another anthology, "Newer Ideas in Art Education," perhaps. This should have a salutary effect. One element that characterizes the high moments in the history of Art Education—be it a Bauhaus or a Black Mountain College—is that they were propelled by people who had a clear idea of the possibilities of their moment, and a clear idea of what they wanted to do about those possibilities. At this particular moment, there is far too little of that kind of thinking, and far too much thinking that is rooted in a cheerleader's desire to protect a socially sanctified gravy train. After all, and despite their best efforts, the gravy train is running dry.

Mark Van Proyen is a Bay Area artist and a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## A conversation with Keith Morrison, dean of academic affairs, San Francisco Art Institute

BY MEREDITH TROMBLE

A distinguished artist, educator, writer, curator and social critic, Keith Morrison arrived at the San Francisco Art Institute in January 1993, as dean of academic affairs. His mandate was to bring an important regional institution into the thick of contemporary issues in art education. Faced with declining enrollment, a lack of administrative leadership, fierce faculty conflict and the sheer difficulty of working as an intermediary between seven

more or less autonomous departments, Morrison recently announced that he would leave SFAI at the end of May to accept a position as dean of the College of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University.

Morrison was born in Jamaica, and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he received both a BFA and MFA. After graduation, he began teaching art in the public schools of Gary, Indiana. He would go on to hold positions as professor or administrator at a number of institutions, including the Maryland Institute of Art and the University of Illinois, Chicago.

**Artweek** *Imagine that you have been given a grant to start an art school. You can structure it any way you wish. What would you do?*

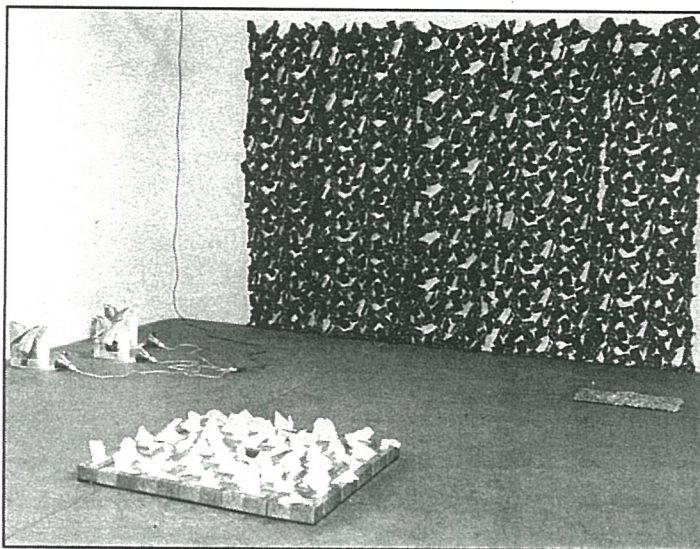
**Keith Morrison** I would begin by changing the makeup. I would include many, many more people of color, from different cultural backgrounds. The profile of the American art school is slanted outrageously towards the white upper middle class, to the point that it does not reflect either the art or the values of the people in

**AW** *Which areas of study would you emphasize?*

**KM** People have to study as broad a base of issues as exists in the society itself. I don't believe that the study of art alone is enough for the making of the art of the future. That's a fallacy under whose legacy we now suffer. If you study art alone, you're only feeding on yourself, not bringing in new ideas. Art is a product of social values and education and history. You need the tools to understand all of those things if you are going to make the art of the future.

You can use a certain amount of your time to study the art of the past, but the art of the past won't tell you what the art of the future is going to look like. Who knows if artists will even be using brushes and canvas in the future? Artists must decide, but you have to give an artist the opportunity to look with intelligence and education at all of the possibilities of today in order to decide what to do tomorrow.

**AW** *Can you describe the ideology you'd like to see at the core of this art education?*



MFA student Heather Dwyer, unfitted installation, fabric, cotton flannel, Kleenex boxes. (Photo: R. John Bache. Courtesy of CalArts.)

the society as a whole. I would like to see an art school that mirrors our society in all its positive complexity.

**AW** *Would your organization be different from current models? Would you add some departments, for instance, or cut others?*

**KM** Those things come. That's the form, and form always ought to follow function. You figure out what you're trying to get, which is a cross-fertilization of cultures in the United States. Elements like departments are subordinate. The basic issue is to get the right cultural mix, to develop a healthy ideological format. Anything else is trivia.

**KM** You need to find a situation where the ideas of people of different races and different ethnic groups have as much exposure and as much profound study as other peoples' ideas. When you have that, then you will know what the substance of your education is going to be. That's one way of developing education, developing new knowledge of art. The other way is to change the interpretation of present knowledge. To some degree, we acknowledge that now when we talk about deconstructing education and the artistic ideas of the past, but it's not happening as sufficiently as it should. We know it's a problem. We fid-

dle with it. But if I look around here, for example, I see that we have probably ten black students. We have a number of Asian students, mostly from Asia, whom we treat as guests. Our faculty is about 99 percent white. Even so, we're really no different than any other art school in this country. We're clones of each other. I'm not saying that with hostility, however. I'm saying it with candor.

**AW** *But what, do you think, is the advantage of an art school equivalent of an Afrocentric education?*

**KM** As it is now, art school is a culture where whites incubate their ideas. But I move around a lot of people of color—not just black—in this country and in other countries—and the issue of dumping the white man's art is not foremost in their minds. What's foremost in their minds is getting some play for what it is they do. They're bitter about that.

I tend to want to move through life in a spirit of good will. I know more about art by whites than most white artists I've met, and I certainly know more about art by black artists than any white artist I've met. Nonetheless, if you were to throw away the art of Michelangelo, Pollock, De Kooning, Clyfford Still or David Smith, or the films of Alfred Hitchcock, or the music of Mozart and Stravinsky, I would die. I would not want to live in that society. Those people are among my gods, and they're protected—it's a given. But if we want to move forward, we need to include other people fully. Otherwise we will never be whole in our community.

**AW** *Given the situation as you find it here, with limited resources, what changes are you making?*

**KM** We are making the curriculum more interdisciplinary. Art schools tend to spend a lot of time dealing with issues that artists are already finished with. I would like to see our curriculum begin to mirror the pattern of how artists actually solve their problems as artists, that is, by working across disciplines, seeing painting, video and performance and other media as tools rather than ideology.

**AW** *Are those experiences that have been important in your own life as an artist?*

**KM** As an artist, I don't work in an interdisciplinary way that much. As an art personality, I do. I write, I curate, I live this crazy

mixed-up life. I'm someone who's made an art life by looking at the art world, by seeing different aspects of it in which I could be involved, and retraining myself. That's what I would like to pass on to students. I see so many artists who are traumatized once they leave art school—they can't do a damn thing because their method of thinking is out of sync with how the art world actually works.

It used to be that you became either a painter or a sculptor, and if you were lucky you became part of a gallery and the gallery took care of you. That system has practically disappeared. It's not that I want students to do it my way, but the transition between art school and the world would be much easier if they recognize that often you do have to reeducate yourself, you do have to take advantage of opportunities, and you have to use your own personality to forge an art career for yourself.

Meredith Tromble, a contributing editor to *Artweek*, is a painter who also does art commentary for KALW-FM.

## Between art and the academy

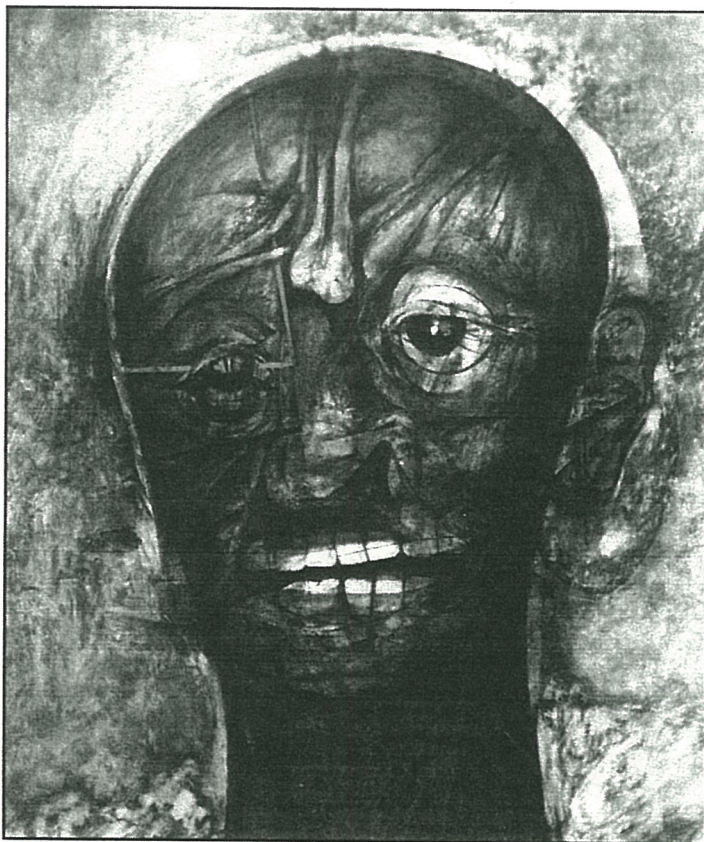
BY BRUNO FAZZOLARI

*I should be very glad if you could see in me something besides an idle fellow.*

—From a letter from Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo

I've been planning to send away for a Ruby Lee Art Kit ever since I first saw one at the Charles Littler Memorial Retrospective, but so far my \$19.95 has been distracted by more pressing emergencies. Ruby Lee was a collaborative artistic venture between the late Charles Littler and his wife, Pat Dolan. These kits contain do-it-yourself string art, complete with media, instructions and even suggestions for content (content is not included). A sort of seventies-era conceptual joke, but a serious joke, like all of Charles's art.

It's the instructions I'm after, really. Charles Littler died about the same time I became serious about art. Initially apprenticed to Hans Hofmann, Charles ventured from painting into conceptualism, performance and sculpture, and at first, he made all the right moves: he got his MFA at New Mexico when the program was hot and eventually found himself on the inside track in with the likes of



Charles Littler, *Self-Portrait*, 1975, charcoal and pastel on illustration board, 36" x 24".

Pollock and Norman Mailer. But then he turned his back on that scene for a teaching job in Arizona. His recent memorial show enabled me to glimpse the products of his long and remarkably engaged career, almost none of which I had ever seen before. His most unusual project is still in process: Rancho Linda Vista, an artist's ranch he founded and nurtured, and whose members range from prominent international artists to obscure local artisans. This is where I was living and studying when he died.

As we enter the second century following the Modernist upheaval, the art world has once again become a highly institutionalized network of biennials, salons and academies populated by individuals in ruthless competition for limited interest and money. Art, like so many other careers, has become professionalized.

The rise of the MFA and the MBA have much in common. I remember an informal reunion of high school friends at which I was disappointed to see how many of them had thrown themselves into business school instead of finding their own more particular paths.

As the recession produced an increasing number of articles about bagboys with MBAs, I wondered what my old friends had come to. Just how many lawyers, MBAs and MFAs could the country absorb? As the making of a livelihood grows more and more competitive, the attachment of an acronym to one's name becomes a means of distinguishing oneself

and refining individuality.

Individuality and identity were concepts that Charles treated with a respectful mockery: in portraits in which physical identity deteriorates into anatomical and formal components, in his collaborative work, in the Ranch whose continuous challenge was to create consensus. His *Self-Portrait* performance series, with titles like *Wig*, *Gay* and *Blind* (he possessed none of these attributes), anticipated the current fascination with cultural and social identity but treated identity with oblique criticism instead of reverence.

When we begin to group meaning, money and identity, as we often do in art, we stray into peculiar waters. Graduate school encourages similar couplings. It is often presented as a path towards maturity and individuality. For more money than many artists will ever make from selling their art, an education and a certificate can be procured, and, if nothing else, it will allow the artist to take herself seriously and encourage institutions and individuals (both in and out of the art world) to do so, as well. Content is not included.

As my particular generation moves into careers (artistic and otherwise), we have begun to feel that we don't exist without degrees, but all of us, some more than others, are participating in the historical (or fiscal) processes of our various fields. During the past year, I, too, have given serious consideration to graduate school, and so I know that many

young artists look to the MFA for a kind of camaraderie, a confirmation of integrity, a badge that reveals how hard we work for our cold water flats and ramen dinners. The artist's path is lonely and often anonymous, a game with bad odds and no instructions. The wider emphasis on professionalism and certification remains a worrisome challenge—if we have all graduated with degrees in the arts and sciences that have proven almost worthless, then why should we expect any more from the next round of certificates?

There's an argument going around that art school corrupts the purity of art with its careerism and compromise, a problem that stems from a competitive climate which pits individuals against each other. In our arrogance and ambition, we artists think we're in control, but really, in this instance, the tail wags the dog: we must lose some of our individuality to join art and serve it.

Charles was always trying to integrate art into the fabric of daily living. In his performance, *Radio*, the performer (it could be any performer) wore a radio ear piece continuously for two weeks, in order to achieve an equilibrium between the radio world and the physical world. Charles concluded the instructions for this performance: "Feelings of alienation which may follow performance will quickly diminish and residual awareness of constant radio activity will remain for some time."

Bruno Fazzolari is a Berkeley-based painter and writer.

## A conversation with Marjorie Levy, executive director, and Pike Powers, artistic program director, Pilchuck Glass School

BY RON GLOWEN

The Pilchuck Glass School began in 1971 as a summer workshop in glassblowing, organized by artist Dale Chihuly and financially supported by Seattle art patrons John Hauberg and Anne Gould Hauberg. From its inception, the artistic program directors (Chihuly, Benjamin Moore and, since 1993, Pike Powers) have merged traditional processes with a native sense of

experimentation and innovation by bringing the best-known glass artists in the world to the secluded campus fifty miles above Seattle. The result has been a phenomenal growth in the development of contemporary glass, both as craft and art.

**Artweek** *You are both artists and educators. Could you characterize the role of the educator at Pilchuck today?*

**Marjorie Levy** Traditionally, teaching involves teachers and learners, or you have teachers as choreographers of learning. At Pilchuck, however, we get students, even if they're not advanced students, involved in research. The teacher, the student and the class are always trying something new—a kiln, a new glass, but most often a new idea. We encourage that kind of approach to learning, to learn not only what, but why. Students and teachers engage in the same process. I think that's why teachers like to teach at Pilchuck. It can be a joint process of discovery for them, too.

**AW** *Can you discuss the notion of "peer instruction" or "peer education"? Are they part of this process?*

**ML** The students learn as much from their peers as they do from their teachers. We jury the applicants for about 60 percent of our classes, with students from all over the world. Students then work in teams, not just in the familiar sense of teamwork in glassblowing, but teamwork in putting together class projects, in deciding how to progress, in working and making decisions together. Peer education has a lot to do with the quality of the student.

**AW** *How are instructors and course offerings selected?*

**Pike Powers** We try to select the best, most publicized and most accomplished artists we can find. We survey the faculty, staff and students as to who they'd like to bring in. I try to match those requests with the interest of that artist as an instructor. It's not quite the atelier system as it was in the beginning, where artists came and did their work and the students were apprenticed to them.

**AW** *The school has always had visiting artists. Now there's an artist-in-residence program. How does it fit into the educational structure?*

**PP** It runs parallel. The artists, Judy Pfaff or Dennis Oppenheim, for example, don't often come with glass experience, but their role is to exemplify a professional