

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

D I L E X I

T H E O A K L A N D M U S E U M

THE DILEXI YEARS: 1958 - 1970

Terry St. John

Since 1945 national and international interest in California art has steadily increased as the most populous state in the union attracted notice for its remarkable ability to generate innovations in industry, lifestyle, and culture. In the last forty years millions of people have flocked to California from all around the country and the world to find their dream. Diversified peoples from differing cultures or ethnic and social backgrounds have been thrown together, and a society has evolved that is unlike any the world has seen before. Its rootlessness, tolerance for the bizarre, and energetic pursuit of varied goals both fascinate and repel those from more traditionally oriented areas.

A unique California art scene quickly evolved after World War II from the extensive but isolated modernist art milieu of the 1920s and 1930s. The oldest art school west of the Mississippi plunged into international art events with a resounding boom when Douglas MacAgy was appointed director of the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) in 1945. One of his first steps to bring nationally recognized art to San Francisco was the appointment of Clyfford Still to the CSFA faculty in 1946. Still, who was one of the most important New York based artists, inspired a host of students to study art under the GI Bill after World War II. Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt taught at the CSFA also, bringing more New York exposure to the local art scene. Through the example of these seasoned artists San Francisco was transformed from a distant outpost of modernism to an art center in its own right, contributing its own original work to the mainstream of international contemporary art.

Terry St. John,
Associate Curator of
Art at The Oakland
Museum, is the author
of "California
Sculpture 1945-1960,"
an essay for the
catalogue of the
exhibition *100 Years of
California Sculpture* at
The Oakland Museum.

In 1946 Marcelle Labaudt established a gallery in memory of her husband Lucien, an artist who died in World War II. Run on a shoestring, the gallery showed some of the best artists associated with the California School of Fine Arts, including Hassel Smith and Richard Diebenkorn. In 1950 former students of Clyfford Still organized the cooperative Metart Gallery which exhibited the work of Still and the organizers. In 1953, poet Robert Duncan and artists Harry Jacobus and Jess established the King Ubu Gallery, which showed Jeremy Anderson and Jess. The Six Gallery, where Ginsberg first

read *Howl*, was established by artist Wally Hedrick in 1954 and showed many artists, including Fred Martin and Manuel Neri. Until her death in 1958, Ethel Gechtoff ran the East and West Gallery, which showed the work of Julius Wasserstein and Jay DeFeo. All of these galleries exhibited the work of artists that the Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco and the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles would eventually show more prominently as the demand for American art grew in the 1960s.

Most of this activity went unnoticed in East Coast based art periodicals, but the scene continued to grow, albeit underground, until the late 1950s when two perceptive spirits were inspired to promote California art more effectively. Walter Hopps, founder of the Ferus Gallery, and Jim Newman, founder of the Dilexi Gallery, were able to attract larger audiences than any gallery directors had been able to do before. The Dilexi and Ferus galleries evolved from the tradition of San Francisco underground galleries that had earlier shown vital avant-garde art but which lacked either the resources, desire, or knowledge needed to reach beyond a small but dedicated audience. Established in 1958 and 1957 respectively, the Dilexi and the Ferus were streamlined galleries with better installations and lighting which could compete with the more elegant uptown galleries. At first, they only received significant critical coverage in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but eventually New York recognized the Dilexi and the Ferus and they became showcases for the best of California contemporary art. Museum curators were influenced in their exhibition choices by the art seen at the Dilexi and Ferus galleries. The early years yielded little money for either the artists or the dealers but it did not matter because neither party was involved for monetary reasons.

The late 1950s was a period of relative political calm after the re-election of Eisenhower helped to end the terror of McCarthyism that began earlier in the decade. Americans had behind them the horrors of World War II and the Korean War, and they were pursuing a dream of material success as never before. The spiritual sterility that Americans displayed in their hurried materialistic frenzy was helped

The Dilexi Years 1958-1970

Handwritten notes and sketches on the left side of the page, including a drawing of a bird and various paragraphs of text.

Beulah Land

a book, a print, & some drawings

FRED MARTIN

AT THE DILEXI GALLERY

6 C 31
3 L A Y
1 Y 1001

SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA

from January 17 to February 11 1967

PRAY TO THE MOSE and on now.

along by the noxious power of television to promote the consumer way of life through carefully designed advertisements. Many Americans, tired of war and threatened by the inquisitions of McCarthy, wanted to conform to the idealized dream exemplified by the "Ozzie and Harriet" type of situation comedy of the 1950s. Although it must have seemed to scholars in the universities that the vast majority of students were destined to remain unquestioning cogs, they also recognized that there were many who had an inward fear of becoming "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," the chilling protagonist of a then current novel by Sloan Wilson, which described an alienating loss of identity that affected corporate professionals of that era. Isolated groups of individuals, restless for alternative and less sterile life styles, did question the dictates of the conformist life. Within a few years, many of these isolated individuals linked up and sought each other out until their presence was heralded as the counterculture of the 1960s.

One small pocket of cultural mavericks was formed in Palo Alto when James Newman and Walter Hopps met as freshmen at Stanford University in 1950. This was a starting point for Newman's interest in art, particularly in contemporary painting and sculpture. During conversations with Hopps in their freshman year, however, Newman was primarily interested in music, particularly jazz. Hopps, on the other hand, had been interested in visual art since high school because of his friendship with Craig Kauffman, an artist who would soon show at the adventurous Felix Landau Gallery in Los Angeles in 1951. In the fall of 1951 James Newman transferred to Oberlin College to study music. He became interested in painting and sculpture of all eras after studying art history with Wolfgang Stechow, and spent many hours studying the Allen Memorial Art Museum collection, particularly their Gorky painting *The Plow and the Song*, 1947, which was one of the first examples of post World War II painting that he had seen. Newman still relied on the contacts that he had made in California. Those associations with Hopps, Kauffman, and other musicians, artists, and writers helped form his attitudes and hone his perceptive abilities to determine what was genuine art and what was superficial. He held intense discussions about contemporary American art which focused on the most dynamic art issues of the day, ranging from Jackson Pollock's drip painting to de Kooning's use of line in his women series. Newman absorbed everything he could about contemporary American art through East Coast periodicals (there were no informed West Coast ones then) and through occasional pertinent local exhibitions. It was not until the summer of 1952 that he was able to view the New York art scene first hand. At the time he was almost unaware of San Francisco art developments. Following this trip, he and other Oberlin students who were interested in music and art wanted to establish a center where music and art could co-mingle, where art and architecture would exist in an idealized

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

environment in a building designed to present those arts. Craig Kauffman, whom Newman had met in Los Angeles during spring vacation of 1951, and Walter Hopps formed a loose association to promote musical concepts. Through these efforts a jazz club at Oberlin sponsored workshops with Dave Brubeck and Count Basie with announcements of these performances designed by Craig Kauffman. In 1953 Kauffman and Hopps organized jazz concerts in Los Angeles at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre but discovered a music scene that was very high pressured and dominated by slick promoters. These experiences convinced the future gallery dealers that the promotion of the visual arts was more wide open.

In 1954 Walter Hopps and Jim Newman were in San Francisco together and had met some of the leading abstract expressionist painters there: Jim Kelly, Julius Wasserstein, Madeline Diamond, Sonia Gechtoff, Wally Hedrick, and Hassel Smith, all of whom were associated with the California School of Fine Arts. They also met Jay DeFeo, who had studied art at the University of California, Berkeley. The two future vanguard art dealers did not meet any sculptors at this time. In the spring of 1955 Walter Hopps and Ben Bartosh, another associate, organized the first comprehensive exhibition of abstract expressionist painting on the West Coast, entitling it "Concert Hall Workshop Presents Action Paintings of The West Coast," more commonly called "The Merry-Go-Round" exhibition. Most of the painting in the show was abstract painting by San Francisco artists, with a few southern California artists also participating. Newman was still very closely associated with Hopps but was inactive in this particular project and did not see it.

In 1955 Jim Newman graduated from Oberlin College and moved to Los Angeles to reestablish his contacts with Walter Hopps, Craig Kauffman and others in order to further pursue his interest in art. Although Los Angeles had, since the 1920s, a well established modernist art scene it lagged behind San Francisco in post World War II art developments. An older generation of Los Angeles artists, typified by Lorser Feitelson, continued to develop their art but abstract expressionist ideas had not been rooted there as they had been in San Francisco. As in San Francisco, Los Angeles artists primarily worked in anonymity, but the artists in San Francisco were less isolated and existed in an urban center with an almost century old bohemian tradition of the arts, where artists had a stronger sense of a community. Particularly after World War II, Los Angeles area artists existed in a spread of communities that intangibly blended into each other, an urban spread that had no clearly identifiable urban center nor clearly identifiable art scene with patrons sustaining an ongoing support system. If this dilemma occasionally produced the inspired efforts of a Simon Rodia in his Watts Towers, it more

often frustrated and discouraged the development of a vital contemporary art scene.

When Jim Newman did arrive in Los Angeles in 1955 he participated in the operations of the recently established small gallery called Syndell Studio, founded by Ben Bartosh, Michael Scoles, Walter Hopps, and Craig Kauffman, which was open from 1954 until 1956. Patterning the gallery after such clandestine San Francisco galleries as The Six, the group helped provide a vital showcase for avant-garde artists in southern California. The gallery was located on Gorham Boulevard in the Brentwood section of Los Angeles. Newman lived in the back of the studio and maintained the gallery hours on an irregular basis. These longtime associates at Syndell hoped to capture and build the enthusiasm created by the recent Merry-Go-Round exhibition. Accordingly, the infrequent visitors were mostly beat generation types from Topanga Canyon, some of whom had seen "The Merry-Go-Round," who came to view exhibitions of works by Sonia Gechtoff, Julius Wasserstein, James Kelly, and an occasional showing of children's art. The next time Newman and Hopps opened galleries there would be a greater impact on the California art community.

In terms of recognition, the gallery scene in Los Angeles and San Francisco was much more grim than in New York. By the mid 1950s New York artists began to receive international acclaim. Even a second generation following de Kooning's pictorial developments achieved recognition and sales. The cooperative galleries that opened on 10th Street in Manhattan served as a type of farm club to the more successful commercial galleries uptown. A strong commercial gallery scene developed in New York. It would be several years before Los Angeles would experience similar developments, and several more before San Francisco began to approach anything close to it. Through supportive connections Walter Hopps and sculptor Edward Kienholz were able to open the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1957, a year before James Newman opened the Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco. For the first time a more or less coordinated effort was made in California to consistently present the most dynamic art that was being done on the West Coast in the late 1950s. Unlike the Syndell venture, the Ferus manifested a great deal of care and concern over presentation of the art. Through careful lighting of the work, immaculate installations, and attractive exhibition announcements, the gallery made every effort for the artists they represented.

Before James Newman decided to establish a gallery in San Francisco, he and Walter Hopps had speculated that San Francisco would be the better launching area for a successful gallery operation. Their reasoning went along these lines: In the 1950s San Francisco was already the center for

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

underground painters, poets, musicians, writers, and filmmakers, primarily in the North Beach section of the city. Newman and Hopps were excited by these developments, identifying with the rebellious new art that was not inhibited by the conformist constraints of the 1950s. San Francisco had had a tradition of iconoclastic, neo-dadaistic work since 1949 when Clay Spohn exhibited a group of assemblages at the CSFA. An attitude among the artists seemed to be that they lived only for the present in the view of the uncertainties of the future. Whether it was the threat of atomic annihilation or the lack of faith in a future mapped out by businessmen, scientists, and technologists, the future was ephemeral and beyond the control of artists. Assemblages by Hassel Smith, although never exhibited, not only had a zany, dadaistic quality to them but were also made of junk materials, underlining their impermanence. Newman had spent many hours at both the Six and East and West galleries, immersing himself in Bay Area Abstract Expressionism before he opened the Dilexi Gallery in 1958. In many artists' work he found hints of Clyfford Still's jagged rough shapes starkly contrasted in heavily painted surfaces. Bay Area painting had an intentionally ugly quality to it, projecting raw paint surfaces rather than refined painterly embellishments.

Although San Francisco had already received national attention for its literary activity with poets such as Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Kenneth Patchen, its notoriety snowballed with the appearance of Jack Kerouac's novel, *On the Road*. However, the attention that painters and sculptors attracted before 1960 was not extensive, with the exception of painters Elmer Bischoff, David Park, and Richard Diebenkorn, who were the first painters from this region to achieve national acclaim as Bay Area Figurative artists. There were so many good artists living in San Francisco in the late 1950s that co-founders James Newman and Bob Alexander of the Dilexi Gallery could exhibit a fine representative cross section of the art scene. The significance of the Dilexi Gallery was that it was the first time in San Francisco that underground art was shown in a gallery that had an uptown look. Unlike the work displayed in the slicker galleries, Dilexi's art had an exciting raw look, cryptic and not ingratiating. It was cutting-edge art done by San Francisco area artists emerging, paradoxically, in an impeccably professional setting. It would have been impossible for the founders of the Dilexi Gallery in 1958 to have foreseen the local gallery scene as it is today, where a multiplicity of false vanguard art styles is often simultaneously uncontroversial and omnivorously collected.

In the late 1950s Broadway was not the beehive of topless, bottomless, and live sex joints that attempt to titillate tourists of today. Tourists did flock to North Beach in busloads to see "beatniks" after Herb

Caen coined the word to symbolize the bohemian life style that Jack Kerouac immortalized in *On the Road*. However, Broadway remained essentially a street of Italian bars, restaurants, and hotels where Mike's Pool Hall still served a generous hamburger on French bread as in the days when Kerouac had visited it. Finocchio's female impersonators blatantly catered to tourists, but the Dilexi gallery location was on a street little changed from the way the beats had perceived it.

Through Hopps, Newman met Bob Alexander, a poet, collagist, and cultural activist who also wanted to further the cause of vanguard art in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1958 they opened the Dilexi Gallery above the Jazz Workshop on Broadway in North Beach, a location they discovered, which allowed Newman to realize some of the dream he and his associates had envisioned while at Oberlin College — to create an environment that would combine the visual arts with music.

It was co-founder Bob Alexander who, while skimming through a Latin-English dictionary, came across the word *dilexi*. Fascinated not only by the sound and look of it in print but also by the meaning, "to select, to value highly, to love," they used the word to identify the gallery until its demise in 1969. The opening exhibition featured the work of fifteen artists in the space which was ideally suited for showing paintings and sculpture. Unlike most galleries of that time, the Dilexi served as a lounge where visitors could sit and look at paintings and books that were prominently displayed. Plans to accommodate visitors with drinks ordered on a dumbwaiter from the bar below was scuttled by the Alcoholic Beverage Commission, but the gallery did provide a relaxed, congenial place to view contemporary art immediately above the location that featured the finest in contemporary jazz, the form of music that inspired so much of the new American painting after World War II.

Although the gallery was well received during its first year, Alexander and Newman had very different personalities which made it difficult to maintain a working relationship for very long. After about eight months Bob Alexander amicably left to pursue what would be his chief interest for the next 25 years, the documentation and preservation of vital but neglected underground art of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in an archival center called the Temple of Man in Venice, California.

During the first year the Dilexi sold more art books than art but many people came into the gallery. Contemporary art was not yet seriously collected in the Bay Area or in California. With the exception of a few private collectors the patronage was minimal. The art that Newman believed in and the intense delight that he received from encouraging the artists rather than profit were the motivations

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

for the Dilexi Gallery. Because of his total absorption, it seemed important to Newman to show art as properly as he could. Also, he felt that the artists themselves would be encouraged in their efforts by having a first rate gallery available to them.

After the first three or four months art criticism coverage for the Dilexi Gallery from the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* increased. Art critics Alfred Frankenstein, Dean Wallace, Tom Albright, and Arthur Bloomfield covered the lively exhibitions with increasing regularity. *Artforum*, founded in 1962, was then a San Francisco based publication which prominently featured the Dilexi Gallery and its individual artists. Eventually, southern California critics and even the *New York Times* recognized that the Dilexi was the premier gallery in town. Grace Glueck of the *New York Times* (May 1, 1969) commented that the Dilexi Gallery was “. . . everything a brave new gallery ought to be. A springboard for the hairy avant-garde, it discovered and pushed local talent, promoted new ideas, and purveyed art ‘objects’ to tuned-in young collections.” Another article in the *New York Times* (reprinted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1965) by Alan Solomon mentions a general cultural conservatism in San Francisco, not unlike that found in Boston or Philadelphia, which looks back to a rich past rather than to the future. In this atmosphere artists struggled to break with established local masters such as Frank Lobdell or Richard Diebenkorn, “when the course of modern American painting has largely led elsewhere.” He wrote “Since there are not many collectors, there is not much support for local artists; a few galleries seem active, but only one of them, Jim Newman’s Dilexi Gallery, has consistently endorsed new talent.” Although the highlights of the Dilexi’s national media coverage can be related in a single paragraph, the amount of such coverage was unprecedented in its time and remains today as an anomaly in the history of media attention for the San Francisco art scene rather than a precedent.

The Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles and the Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco continued a sort of loose association that existed for a number of years. Not only did San Francisco artists Jay DeFeo and Hassel Smith show at the Ferus Gallery and Dilexi Gallery, but Ferus Gallery artists Ed Moses and Craig Kauffman showed at the Dilexi Gallery. Kauffman, one of the original group dating from before the Syndell Studio, had two shows at the Dilexi Gallery in 1958 and 1960 while he lived in San Francisco for several years. Kauffman continued to be close to Newman and assisted him in gallery operations in a variety of ways before moving back to southern California to continue his connection with the Ferus Gallery, Walter Hopps, and Irving Blum, the new co-ordinator.

The type of art that Jim Newman showed at Dilexi was determined by his interests and tastes, which changed and matured, opening up in response to radical movements in the American art scene. Increased communications via the media meant that artists all across America were instantly exposed to new art developments ranging from Pop to Minimal. Artists on the one hand purified and eliminated what was considered to be inessential in modernism, and on the other delved into experimentation with media ranging from plastics to neon lighting in order to expand the boundaries of art. Newman's gallery reflected many of these changes, and by the mid 1960s still featured the rough, gritty, tough art laced with humor that became known as "Funk," as well as the more streamlined, high tech, metal work of Tony DeLap and Phil Makanna. Bay Area Figurative painting by established artists such as Diebenkorn and Park or with those that were influenced by them, received no exposure in the gallery with the exception of Manuel Neri, who, in his one show there in 1960, exhibited primarily non-objective plaster work.

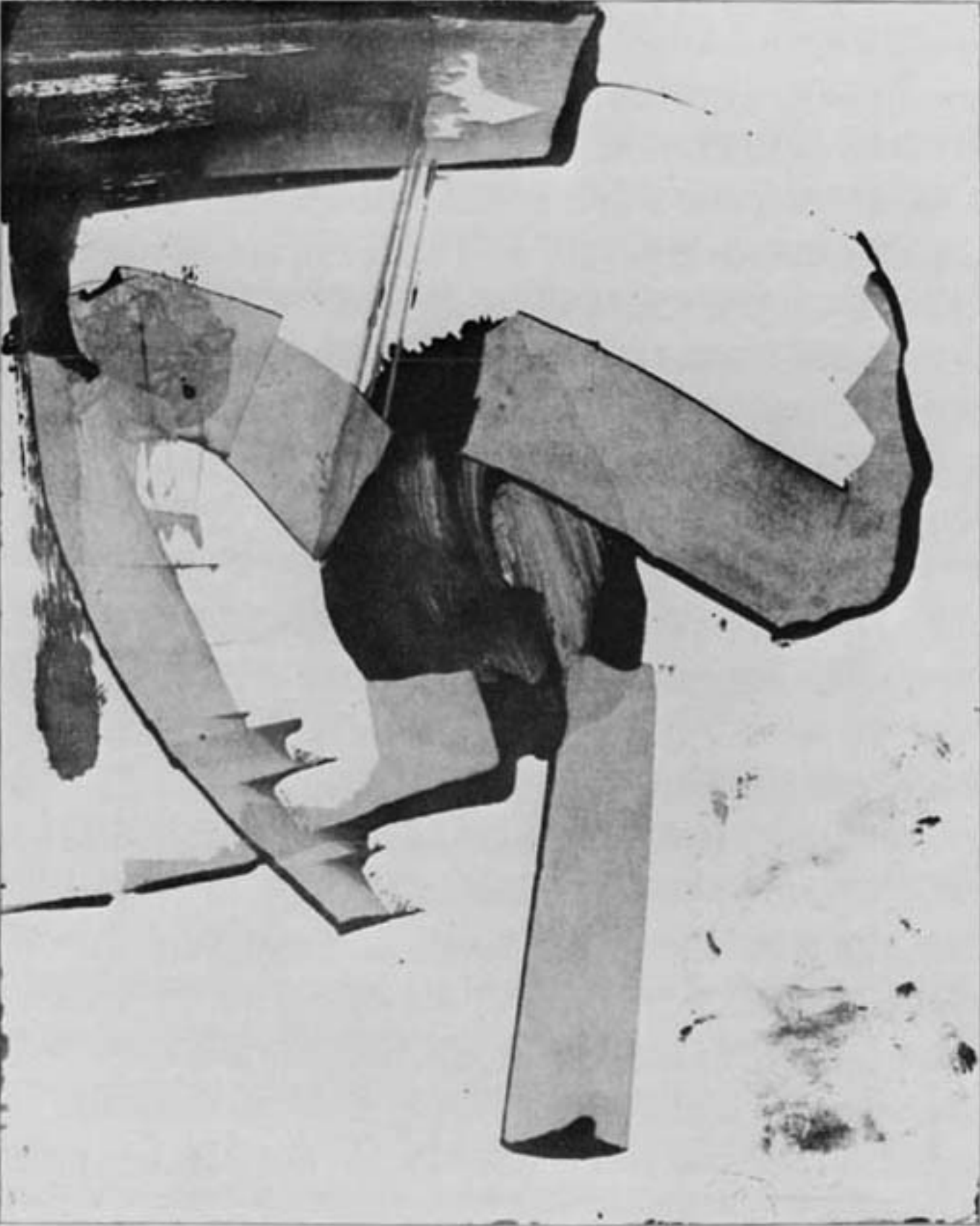
One of the early painters that Newman was able to recruit for his gallery was Hassel Smith, a veteran of the 1940s at CSFA who had previously shown at the Ferus Gallery as well as in New York and London. By the time that Newman was on the scene Smith had developed a style of Abstract Expressionism that was highly original, featuring improvised lines with humorously absurd configurations of squiggly biomorphic forms related in many ways to the free form jazz improvisations that the artist so admired. Irreverent, intentionally ugly, or inelegant techniques became known to the American art world as Funk Art following an exhibition organized by Peter Selz at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1967 that included many of the artists in San Francisco who both employed and made fun of the traditional precepts of modernist abstraction. A regional attitude towards making art that seemed to parody the high seriousness of art being done in the East Coast and in Europe persists to this day in the work of William Wiley, Roy De Forest, Robert Arneson, and the late Jeremy Anderson.

Newman tried to show the best art that was available to him in California and in other cities as well. Because of his geographic location and resources he could not show established New York artists with any sort of regularity. However, through contacts that Newman had made, including regular trips to New York, he was able to bring the work of Alfred Jensen, John Chamberlain, and H. C. Westermann to the Dilexi. In 1963 he had a large exhibition entitled "Forty Six Works from New York," which included pieces by Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. Although Bay Area artists remained important to Newman throughout the Dilexi period, his early contacts with the art scene had

The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970

HASSEL SMITH

an exhibition of recent drawings by -



January 29th to February 24th (Preview: Monday, January 29th, 5-8 p.m.)

DILEXI ● gallery 1828 Union Street San Francisco WAInut 2-1004

given him a broad base of acquaintance with the work of artists in other cities, and he seemed to welcome the opportunity to provide Bay Area artists and collectors a chance to view the work of their contemporaries.

Well known New York artists who taught in Berkeley such as Sidney Geist, Sidney Gordin, and Wilfrid Zogbaum also had one man shows at the Dilexi Gallery. Moreover, Dilexi artists were being invited to participate in exhibitions throughout the country from the Walker Art Center to the Whitney Museum of American Art. In October 1966 the Dilexi Gallery and Betty Parsons Gallery in New York were chosen to have a group of their artists represent the United States for the prestigious *2^e Salon international de Galeries-pilotes* in Lausanne, Switzerland. Newman also showed some lesser known New York artists who were pleased to have the Dilexi as an outlet for their work.

In the 1960s American contemporary art sales were increasing dramatically all around the country, particularly in New York and Los Angeles but also in Denver, Dallas, and Kansas City. The Bay Area was expanding as a center of art productivity, but art sales were minimal here. Although the Bay Area produced far more artists than it could realistically support, they thrived in a beneficial cultural climate. Newman had great expectations but he came to realize that because of its size, San Francisco would never be able to financially support the number of good artists here. Nevertheless, he was willing to make changes to help his artists. Because he was dissatisfied with the boutiqueization of Union Street Newman began looking for a new location for the gallery. In 1965 he moved to a much larger space on Clay Street where a number of galleries were relocating because of proximity to the business district of San Francisco. In a short while the area between Jackson Square and the financial district became a prime area for both out of town collectors and local people to visit. The first year after the Dilexi move was the most profitable to date. The combination of a more accessible location, the new art boom, and built-up patronage enhanced the gallery's success. Although the Dilexi was not always profitable, and some lean years followed, the move to Clay Street was good for Newman and his artists on almost every level, including reasonable sales. While sales were not the major focus of the gallery, they certainly are a factor in the maintenance and upkeep of any gallery and of concern to the artists.

In the mid-1960s San Francisco was a drastically different city than it had been at the time of the founding of the Dilexi Gallery in 1958. A number of monumental social events rapidly changed our culture, and the arts responded to these changes. A sixties society emerged, based on the increasing

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

impact of our Americans fighting a distant and unjust war, civil rights inequities, radical change in traditional life styles, and the hippie movement; the effects of which were exacerbated by messages from the media, particularly television.

In the early years of the Dilexi, the art that was shown was generally somber, exploring the darker side of interior realities. From the work of Jay DeFeo to that of Alvin Light a gritty earnestness was projected. By the mid 1960s younger San Francisco artists were reflecting a more playful side of life. The visual pun, the humorous title, or the unexpected visual prank appeared frequently. A freer, looser kind of approach was present in their art. Gallery openings, unlike those of today with their ritualistic formalities, had not only a relaxed casual ambience but were also an excuse to have a party, to celebrate life, to drink, or to dance to music frequently performed by the artists themselves. The earlier generation of artists spent many hours listening to and talking about musicians and music, early jazz, and blues. Although music interests were shared by most of the Dilexi Gallery, the younger artists were more oriented toward rock. Some of them were musicians as well as painters and sculptors.

Just as San Francisco participated in the cultural revolution of the 1960s, so did its artists work with more varied visual approaches. The imagery came from many sources and included literary allusions and a wider variety of media than had been used previously in the Bay Area. The Bay Area produced art and rock music with a special irreverent feeling underlined by a toughness that grew out of assurance that the artists knew "where it was at." The Dilexi artists confidently reflected the visual enthusiasms of the American art scene. One of Newman's ideas was to show art that was progressive in its time and did not rigidly adhere to the academic influences that had sprung up at the San Francisco Art Institute and the University of California, Berkeley. In San Francisco of the 1960s many Dilexi artists tapped into intangible sources of inspiration generated by the stimulating environment. The art created in San Francisco certainly had a regional stamp to it, but was not provincial and it merged easily into the contemporary art world. What made the art interesting were the differences that reflected the unique area and times within which it was created.

As the San Francisco area continued to be a center for producing new and innovative art, Los Angeles was also experiencing not only an unparalleled creative burst in the visual arts but also the development of an art support system to accompany it. A new, major, eleven and a half million dollar Los Angeles County Museum of Art opened, and collectors such as Norton Simon, Howard Ahmanson,

Fred Weisman, Bart Lytton, and David Bright were behind the push. A vast gallery scene in the La Cienega area featured well appointed galleries that showed the latest vanguard art in addition to more traditional art approaches. The Ferus Gallery was flourishing as never before. In response Newman decided in 1962 to open a Dilexi Gallery in Los Angeles under the direction of Rolf Nelson, previously an assistant at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, while maintaining his Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco. Although the shows were of the same quality as those in San Francisco, and, in most instances were San Francisco shows organized to travel afterwards to Los Angeles, unfortunately it was one of the low points in Dilexi history. Los Angeles was the second center of art sales in the country, and James Newman felt that the new operation would do well financially and critically because of his faith in his artists. However, he overestimated the response that would come from the Los Angeles art community. The Dilexi Gallery was vying for the same collectors as the Ferus Gallery and would have fared as well by trying to interest them from its home base in San Francisco. The Dilexi had neither the inclination nor the capacity to indulge in hard sell techniques or to streamline its approach to art dealing to compete with Beverly Hills galleries of that decade. It proved impossible to create a new group of interested collectors. The gallery folded within a year and Newman's efforts once again focused on the San Francisco area.

As the turbulent sixties drew to a close, Newman began to question whether his private world of art was somewhat beside the point in face of the pressing social issues in America. Newman was eager to explore other art enterprises which seemed to have the capacity to communicate to a larger audience than his Dilexi Gallery could reach. Increasingly, Newman became interested in artists who worked in or switched to other media, such as film, videotape, theater, and conceptual art. Moreover, he was tired of the day to day grind of running a gallery. Because Newman's involvement with the Dilexi was prompted primarily by his love of art, he increasingly found it tedious to deal with collectors who often wanted to be assured that the art they were to purchase was good. Newman felt that if one did not feel strongly about art there was no reason to buy it. He finally decided to close the gallery in 1969. Newman wanted to return to what had initially attracted him to art, the particular energy that went into the creation of a great work of art. He wanted to get closer to the creative impulse rather than to be immersed in the entangling webs of the art community. However, rather than abruptly shut the Dilexi Gallery, Newman turned it over to Philip Linhares, under the sponsorship of the San Francisco Art Institute, to direct until the gallery's lease ran out several months later in 1970.

Newman immediately formed the Dilexi Foundation with Ralph H. Silver as an associate. Silver was a

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

promoter of avant-garde projects, and he and Newman set out to present artists with an opportunity to reach a large audience by television, to see if a mass audience could be put more in touch with its creative impulses. The first project, produced in collaboration with San Francisco educational station KQED, was a TV series of thirteen one-hour programs, each created with total freedom by artists ranging from Terry Riley to Buckminster Fuller and Walter de Maria. The series was guided by the same desire Jim Newman had for the Dilexi Gallery, to show art to a responsive public. This time Newman allowed artists access to a mass audience through a relatively new medium. Although KQED was not a national network it reached many more people than a gallery could accommodate. Guerilla theater and spontaneous events in the streets and in public areas were not unusual in 1969, and the bold attempt to produce art for a mass audience required artists who were interested in conceptualizing events to reach many more people than artists who created to reach smaller, more intimate groups of people. Although some very fine programs were produced, the results were mixed. Further, it was difficult to determine how many members of a new audience could be counted on to watch the programs. Ideally Newman would have liked to have a medium that would have reached millions instead of thousands, a national rather than a local audience.

The second project that James Newman and Ralph Silver embarked on in 1969 was even more ambitious than the television series. The Dilexi Foundation and Lawrence Halprin and Associates envisioned *September 1970*, thirty-five separate out-of-door environmental art events to take place in all areas of San Francisco throughout the month of September. Artists were to be invited from all over the world to create public art pieces. The new project was intended to provide opportunities for a mass audience to experience art which was designed to remove the boundaries between art, technology, and everyday life. As a prelude to *September 1970*, the Dilexi Foundation staged thirteen art events in the Bernal Heights neighborhood and nearby industrial areas of San Francisco. This celebration was entitled *September 12, 1969*. The pieces ranged from sky and water events to the construction of a geodesic dome in Precita Park by the Dancer's Workshop. Other participants included Tony Gnazzo, Andrew Hoyem, and the Media Center of California College of Arts and Crafts. A film was to be produced to attract backing for the larger and far more elaborate event, *September 1970*. However, in 1970 it became apparent that the \$300,000 needed to finance the larger endeavor could not be raised, so the project was abandoned and a magnificent dream came to an end.

The Dilexi Gallery's activities during its twelve year span reflected in many ways the quick changing and explosive developments of the larger American art scene of the 1950s and 1960s as they occurred

in San Francisco. From a tough, gritty San Francisco brand of Abstract Expressionism to the "cool TV" medium of video, the Dilexi Gallery contributed immensely to the contemporary California art scene by helping important vanguard art to surface and to be recognized.

In order to more fully understand the impact of the Dilexi Gallery on the San Francisco Bay Area art scene, gallery activities have to be viewed not only from our perspective in 1984 but also from the perspective of the Dilexi years, 1958-1970. The Dilexi Gallery's role in supporting its artists, encouraging serious collectors, and legitimizing underground art was crucial in an era when there was very little public or private support for avant-garde art. The Dilexi Gallery charted the way for much of what is now taken for granted by the San Francisco Bay Area art world. It was the first successful showplace for the newest, most vital art developments that transpired in Northern California after World War II. The striking originality of the many landmark exhibitions that were held there aroused a great deal of interest in the gallery and its artists both regionally and nationally. The art was of high quality and it was presented and promoted in ways that helped to attract recognition from art critics, newspapers, periodicals in California, and on occasion, in New York. As a result, visiting art aficionados, collectors, and curators were aware that the Dilexi Gallery was the place to go to see important San Francisco avant-garde art, art that was being increasingly recognized among the most interesting new American art.

When the Dilexi first opened its doors in 1958, it was the latest in a series of underground San Francisco art galleries that began in 1946. The Dilexi, as did others, provided an alternative space to show progressive art then largely ignored by museums and commercially oriented galleries. Unlike the earlier underground galleries, however, the Dilexi had a broad based audience. And, unlike the traditional uptown galleries which catered to conservative or safe taste, the Dilexi encouraged a new breed of San Francisco collectors, who were adventurous and willing to learn about some of the area's most creative artists. New collections began to develop which would prove important to the Bay Area art scene.

In 1958 no one could have predicted the dozens of well appointed galleries that show "serious art" to large audiences today. When the Dilexi opened in that year, vanguard art was so far in the forefront of art developments in San Francisco that only a limited audience had the awareness and understanding of the art being shown. For the most part, potential collectors would have been bewildered, or would have considered the art too controversial to collect.

*The
Dilexi Years
1958-1970*

James Newman grew tired of the business end of the Dilexi Gallery at about the time that the gallery scene in San Francisco was rapidly expanding in 1969. From the start, Newman was less interested in selling than in helping his artists to have a first rate place to show their art. His own excitement at being close to the creative impulse was in many ways his chief reward. As a dealer, his idealism was as pure as it had been in his student days at Oberlin. Sales were important to him inasmuch as they helped his artists, and inasmuch as they defrayed the tremendous overhead of operating his gallery. Newman was, unlike many of today's dealers, not interested in fads but in original visual ideas that struck a responsive chord within him. Although he was knowledgeable about New York art which he exhibited, he truly appreciated and recognized art that was done in this area for its own merits and not for its relationship to better publicized art movements from New York or elsewhere.

Many of the Dilexi artists continue to contribute immensely to the American art scene. Some are more famous than others. Some rarely exhibit their work and create in relative isolation. All in all, looking back fourteen years after the gallery closed, it can be safely said that the Dilexi years made a remarkable impact on the San Francisco Bay Area art scene.

Some information
contained in this essay
was found in the
microfilms of the Dilexi
Gallery Papers,
Archives of American
Art, Smithsonian
Institution and in the
reprint of an oral
history interview:
James Newman
interview by Paul J.
Karlstrom, May 13,
1974, Archives of
American Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.



GUI DE ANGULO

Dilexi Gallery
Interior, 1958

THE DILEXI YEARS AND BEYOND

*A conversation with
Jay DeFeo, Craig
Kauffman, Ron
Nagle, Jim Newman,
and Judy Newman*

When asked to contribute a piece for the *Dilexi Years* catalog I was faced with the problem of what to write about. A series of reminiscences wouldn't do. I'm not very good at story telling. A reevaluation of the Dilexi and its contribution is best left to someone else. Finally, it occurred to me that the best approach might be to get a few of the key instigators together and have a free-wheeling conversation, with anecdotes, opinions, judgments, whether judicious or not, and if it went well, maybe we'd get the basic stuff said. I think it went well.

-Jim Newman

Jim:

The Dilexi Years is coming up at The Oakland Museum this fall so I asked Jay DeFeo, Craig Kauffman, and Ron Nagle to come together to reflect on what it was like then and what it's like now. We're talking about a 30 year time span and at least some of us go back that far . . . I would like to begin by recalling the fifties when I first became involved with art. It seems there was a very different prevailing mood. The artists I knew seemed to be disconnected from what was then regarded as the professional art world. They were operating in a very separate environment and I sensed a prevailing attitude of radicalism, an underground activity which had a relationship with what was being called the "beat generation," involving writers primarily, but including painters and sculptors as well. That attitude and environment attracted me and I identified with it. With the Dilexi Gallery I felt that rather than performing an economic function I was performing more of a missionary or even maybe a political function of some sort. I sense that since that time things have changed radically, and since Jay and Craig were around at that time and Ron came along a little later, I'd be interested in hearing what any of you might have to say about that time and how things have changed.

Jay: I agree wholeheartedly with what you said about your role in the gallery and I talk about that often, particularly because I am in contact with students so much and their concern with getting into the art world and having exposure and so on. I always bring up the Dilexi Gallery as a point of contrast between the prevailing attitude that you had and the far more commercial attitude of today, and just what the difference in that climate is.

Jim: As an artist what does it feel like today as opposed to before? Do you see your role as having changed because of these external changes?

Jay: Well, to tell you the truth, Jim, I am more or less continuing to paint from the same kind of personal motivation that I always did. Thus far the commercial world hasn't pressured me into any kind of radical changes in my own work, if that's what you're saying . . .

Jim: Anyone else care to comment? Craig?

Craig: Well, I think the art world in general has changed. The role of your gallery and other galleries in the fifties and the attitude of artists in general, particularly on the West Coast, has changed radically but it has also changed in New York. I dropped in New York for a period of time in the fifties and I remember it changing radically within just a few years.

There were very few commercial galleries either in Los Angeles or San Francisco *period*, let alone ones that would show any, in quotes, avant-garde art. There really wasn't much avant-garde art in L.A. at all . . . so we really had to come up here, and there had been a group of artists mostly around the school (the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute) and then afterwards, and that's when I came up and met you, Jay, in the mid-fifties when Walter (Hopps) first met you and I met you along in there too, and so there was more of that here and that's why I lived up here in the late fifties and early sixties until that really came along in L.A. later.

Jay: Well, essentially there were two rather dramatic differences, I think. One of them was that exposure was first of all largely through competitive shows the (San Francisco) Museum (of Art) put on. That was one way of making yourself seen and the other one, of course, was through the small community galleries such as the Six. One would replace another and then Jim came along with something that was an absolute original. He was in a position not to be commercial but to be selective in the artists that he

chose to handle, and because of that he was totally unique from the so-called more commercial schlocky kind of galleries that will always prevail, I suppose. But the people that were really doing something were in cooperative galleries and later adopted by Jim through the Dilexi.

Craig: I remember the role of the annuals and it was also true of Los Angeles. It was really one of the main places that you saw anyone's work because there weren't these other spaces. I remember going to the Six and before that there was another one — the King Ubu, which was before the Six and that was the tradition. Is that tradition still going on today, that sort of co-op gallery?

Jay: Well, I think they have been forced into it, like the South of Market Open Studios and so on, but it never has been the same. The population explosion is such that you just don't have the same community, as underground as it was in those days. It was kind of a small art community and it's hard to realize, Jim, that when we were on Fillmore Street practically the whole community kind of centered itself in that location.

Jim: So when you were students you knew older artists who were your teachers at that time. I don't know what examples they provided for you but certainly the prevailing example is not one of an embracing kind of art world context in which you would be able to pursue successful careers. Perhaps you'd be able to find a space to show your work . . . a secure teaching position or something along the way. It's interesting that you're all teaching today. The students that are coming along today — how do they view what's going on outside on the art scene in terms of providing opportunities for them? Do they think more in terms of careers that you did?

Ron: I think so, they're all on the art make, real heavy, in fact it's obnoxious I think. They're more preoccupied with making it, I think, than they are about their work in some cases, not in all cases, but that's been my experience . . .

Jim: Are their examples more from the rock and roll world than from the art world, or do they look at artists that have made it and see emulating that way to success?

Ron: People are more involved with careerism, it's another movement.

Jay: Well, I think it affects us as teachers a great deal, because when we were still undergraduates,

generally then when you got out into the art world if you couldn't produce work of quality there was no place for you, in teaching anyway. It wasn't a prerequisite to have an MFA. You could be a high school dropout . . .

Jim: It seems to me that going back to the late fifties and early sixties too, that artists somehow felt that they had to be true to something, whether it was internal or external. There seemed to be a kind of integrity that was operating that was very basic to whatever they were producing . . .

Ron: Part of the problem I think came out of the sixties, which sort of perpetuated this weird notion that everybody's an artist, everybody is creative. And the idea of having to have something original or have some kind of personal vision or identity or integrity, that pressure went out with acid or whatever that made that thing happen. "Hey, I just put on feathers, did my makeup, hey, I'm an artist too . . ." The integrity factor was so heavy in the late fifties and early sixties that if you didn't really have a completely original look . . . that pressure just isn't there anymore. I think too much pressure can actually make you stop working.

Jay: The integrity just went haywire and was just a little bit overly romantic in those days. The idea of selling anything, and Jim you can recall that too, it was an embarrassment to sell something almost. I am exaggerating, of course, but the fact remains that, along with record keeping, selling anything was next door to selling out. And it's not a bad thing, the idea that quality work is rewarded with actually making it financially in the world, but that was not the image of the time, back in the fifties. Now it's become expectable and possible to sell paintings in this day and age, but on the other hand we get a lot of hustlers who just don't have anything to back it up. They're in there for the fast buck, too.

Craig: I think that today we're not only dealing with larger numbers of artists, but it is really much more complex than it was. Also in the fifties there was such a separation of generations with the Second World War and I guess I was in the third generation of post-war artists, and it seemed to be that fewer artists were making things. Plus people are living a lot longer, and so often I talk to students about this logjam of artists. There didn't use to seem to be all those generations ahead of me. There was one generation and a few other people, older artists, but now there seems such an incredible bulk. But at the same time there is such a youth emphasis, nothing goes over like . . .

Ron: That's another thing, if you didn't make it by the time you were 22 you thought you were over the hill. I remember feeling that, now it's completely changed . . .

Craig: I can remember back in the fifties having a pretty naive attitude towards survival, just getting by until next year and being committed to the work and getting a show, and then some vague idea that maybe down the road I might get a teaching position or be able to sell a few paintings. And I remember if my name appeared in an art magazine, a little teeny blurb, that was a big thrill. There were fewer art magazines and the focus was so much different, and Jim was talking about the beatnik days when we used to go over to North Beach, the number of beats and the places we went to was really very small, and we knew everybody. You can contrast that to the hippie movement of the sixties where there were thousands of people involved and the communication was so different. In the fifties I went to New York and fell into the Cedar Bar and in a few days met most of the artists that I wanted to meet. The scene was so much smaller and that idea today is kind of far out. Some of these young artists are so removed, and they have their friends and it's much more structured and a many leveled kind of complex thing. The old idea most galleries followed was to have a stable of artists whom they stuck by like Jim's gallery, and now there are very few galleries either in New York or out here that really stick by that. It's a floating crap game of artists now; if you don't sell you're out. And also today you really have gallery engineered and gallery motivated art. They actually tell the artists what to paint and if they don't want to do that, they can find somebody else that will . . .

Ron: I remember, before, when you wouldn't want to be associated with a gallery unless you dug everybody in the stable. "Oh I don't like so and so, so I'm not going to show in that gallery." Now you wouldn't think like that. You're not in a position to do that anymore . . .

Jim: The idea of a gallery generated art style is a very radical notion to me. That's really avant-garde. It is beyond anything I could even conceive of then.

Ron: Well, the Ferus Gallery (Los Angeles) or the Dilexi Gallery really did have a stance. There was a particular kind of look. At that time there was a particular kind of attitude that I think was good.

Craig: Well, I can remember in the early sixties there was a meeting at the Ferus Gallery and the artists decided if another artist could show there. I remember they vetoed this one very well known artist and Irving Blum didn't show him. That today would be totally incomprehensible. There are pressures

within certain galleries and there are galleries that try to keep a look or direction, but to be so directed as the galleries were at one time, I just don't think they are anymore . . . I like painting and the history of painting, immediate and past.

Jay: There was a respect for that kind of thing in the fifties.

Craig: At least if you rejected it totally, you would in a sense know what you were rejecting. Of course we recently came out of an era in the late sixties and early seventies, a kind of hyper-intellectualism in painting. It was almost a university oriented kind of art.

Ron: That is what is so frustrating today, that we find in teaching too, like a lot of these people, you say to them, "Did you ever see so and so?" They say "Who are you talking about?" And their art shows it. There is no sense of history or depth or respect about what they're doing.

Jim: Does this suggest that this art you're talking about, the new kind of artists you're describing, the art itself, has any more connection with the rest of what's going on in the culture than the art of 30 years ago? Or is that superficial?

Ron: I think there is just more connection between all the arts. In the old days, in the fifties, there was such a schiz between art, music, theater. It's all kind of been put together now. I think that's made a difference.

Jim: Some people are concerned that art have a political function or a social function, that it can't be isolated from the culture, or shouldn't be. You find break dancers regarding themselves as artists, or graffiti artists or whatever, people who have emerged into the mainstream of things, that come out of certain ethnic groups, and there seems to be a desire on the part of some people to embrace this as reflecting a deep strain that's going on in the culture, and that the art attitude that we're talking about from the past seems perhaps irrelevant or isolated, that it's self-referential, that it has really very little to do with anything outside of itself or its antecedents. Is there any truth to this? Why do you do what you do, and is it an attempt to connect with something that is underlying everything, a sort of philosophic search, or what?

Jay: I consider my art pretty private, personally. But hasn't that always existed? There've always been

artists that are more socially oriented and those that have worked from a more private point of view. I think side by side throughout art history, even as you look back, there were people that were more interested in social issues as artists and those that weren't . . .

Craig: It's almost as if people are merchandising sort of raw energy. When things are really energetic or things are happening, that seems to be where people's attention goes. And it is a very short attention span. You make the rounds of the New York galleries, at least downtown, and a good 80-90% of them are all showing the same things, and you go back a year later and it's a whole different set of the same things.

Ron: And it's real funny to see people kind of fit their work, even if they have worked in a certain tradition, all of a sudden, "OK, first I was an image painter but now I'm going to have to put a figure in there some way." It's real funny to see that cop out . . .

Jim: That sort of started in the sixties though, didn't it, with the emergence of the first post-abstract expressionist work.

Ron: But things are moving so fast. That's why I keep equating it with music because the trends are happening so fast and coming and going, I think, much faster than before.

Craig: I think that Jim's got a very good point because, after all, the expansion of the art world in terms of a really commercial scene did start in the late fifties and early sixties. And a lot of the kinds of art, Pop Art and so forth, invented a lot of these ideas in a sense. And these ideas were adapted later on by gallery dealers and museum dealers. The whole idea that gallery dealers would be as famous, if not more famous, than the artists that they're showing and really the center of attention was, I'm sure, very foreign to Jim's idea of what a gallery dealer was like, but that's not unusual today. It's like the personality of the dealer is more important than what he or she sells . . .

Jim: What haven't we covered?

Ron: We really haven't talked about the Dilexi Gallery. That's worth talking about.

Jim: Well, we could fall into the old nostalgia kind of thing.

Ron: No, I don't think it's nostalgia. There's a lot more to it than that for me.

Jim: Well, say what you have to say.

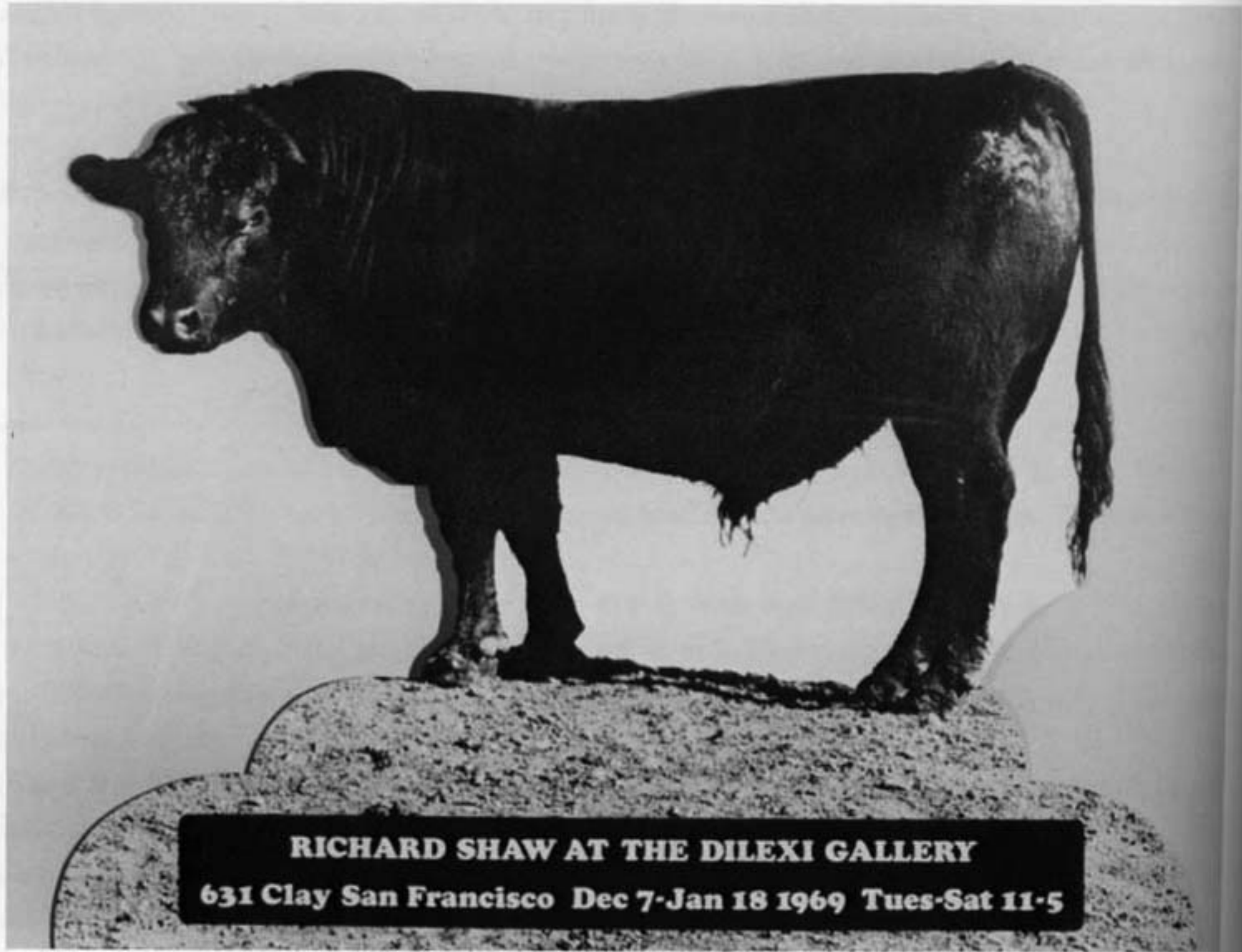
Ron: Well, for me there was a certain kind of art going on in San Francisco. I happen to be a native but I really never identified with the kind of painting, with a few exceptions, that was going on in San Francisco in the late fifties, what I always referred to as the "banana hand school," you know, David Park and Bischoff and who else? I thought, "What is this?" I couldn't figure it out . . .

Jim: The "banana hand school?"

Ron: Well, you know, these figures looked like . . .

Jay: I hadn't thought of it that way but I'll never forget it.

Ron: Well, you know, a particular kind of mentality that was supposed to be the hip thing that was going on here. I was always looking to L.A. and I said, "What is this going on down there?" And there was an art community in L.A. and it was very elite and your studio had to look a particular kind of way and I'm talking about the Ferus Gallery particularly. If I went down La Cienega nobody looked at Rico Lebrun or Jack Zajac, you went into a particular place. So when I became aware of the Dilexi Gallery, and I'm talking about the Dilexi on Union because I missed the one on Broadway I guess, it was like, wow! It had clean white walls and it looked like the artist was consulted about the installation and it emulated a particular kind of aesthetic which was foreign to the Bay Area and it was considered by the macho expressionists of the Bay Area to be, you know, fetish finish and slick. It was a different kind of thing. It was the first time I had a chance to see Manuel's (Neri) work and it was unheard of for someone to be working in chicken wire and plaster and cardboard because it was considered impermanent. It was the first time I had a chance to see (H. C.) Westermann. It stood for a different kind of thing, and it gave people who were different than what was happening, primarily at the Art Institute I would say . . . I mean there were always exceptions like Jay, like Manuel, the kind of people you were showing. The gallery had a stance is what I'm saying, and throughout its various manifestations it always kept that stance. It was also the first mainstream gallery that gave ceramics a shot. It gave me a shot, it gave Richard (Shaw) a shot, and other people. You know, we were in craft galleries before the Dilexi.



RICHARD SHAW AT THE DILEXI GALLERY
631 Clay San Francisco Dec 7-Jan 18 1969 Tues-Sat 11-5

Jay: You sort of took us in off the street, Jim, and gave us respectability.

Ron: Well, I think that's true. It did give us respectability because here was all this stuff made out of chicken wire and cardboard in this very slick salon-type environment. It did give it credibility. And I think that's very important. It was the first gallery to bring professionalism, and I don't mean that in a negative sense, to San Francisco. There were others who would like to claim that they did that but I don't believe that to be true. I think you did it.

Jay: I remember my attitude toward it in those years was that, you know, I had shown without any second thoughts. First of all there was The Place in North Beach and any little galleries that would have me, I was perfectly willing to hang it up. But when Jim's gallery came along it did have class and all of a sudden I was wondering if I was ready for my first grown-up show. I remember asking you, Jim, "Does it look all right?" I kept wanting an opinion from him. And you turned around and said something like, "Did you have any doubts?" Did I ever have doubts??

Ron: Also, there was that whole deal about "selling out." It was like, if you were in that kind of gallery in San Francisco, you were "selling out," you know, because it had some kind of commercial . . . there was no demand to sell the work, but if the gallery was clean and it wasn't a storefront. Like, "Oh, yeh, Dilexi's sold out." There was some of that. That was just bitterness by some people.

Jim: There was still the left flank.

Ron: Absolutely! I think it's important to remember that the Dilexi was a precursor to your John Berggruen type gallery. If you would say, "OK, I want to play the big room in town here," now it's John Berggruen, in the old days it was Dilexi.

Jay: But the essential difference was that Jim wasn't commercial in that sense.

Ron: No, that's the thing. There was no demand to be that.

Jay: He just had a first-class looking place.

- Ron:* My first exposure to that kind of space was in L.A. at the Ferus Gallery. Seeing major people or people who are now considered major, you gave them a shot. A lot of people would never come to this town or show because either they were thought of as uncool or . . . I don't know why, because it was a provincial place and it still is really, to this day I think, especially in terms of sales.
- Jay:* Actually in a certain sense that has continued. It always was and still is. In spite of all the things we've talked about, relatively speaking, to other cities.
- Jim:* So it still occupies the same kind of position in relation to the rest of the world as it did back then?
- Ron:* I'm not personally griping. I do OK. If I have a show in town I do quite well, but in general I would have to say I think it's still very podunk really.
- Judy:* And yet artists continue to want to be here and show here.
- Ron:* That's all that hippie-dippie stuff.
- Judy:* That was true then and it's true now.
- Jim:* For the same reason a lot of people like to live here.
- Ron:* I think that's more it, really, it's just scenic, it's a nice place to live. I agree with that.
- Judy:* There's a community of people . . .
- Ron:* But not the kind of community that I thought . . . talking about the Ferus Gallery, they were a group of people, a group of artists who really collectively had some kind of predetermining . . . I mean you could probably talk about that more, Craig, but it was like a community and there was an aesthetic about what your studio had to look like . . . don't you think?
- Jim:* Does that still exist there at all?

Craig:

Well, I don't know exactly. It's become pretty complex down there. I'm hearing what you're saying. It's pretty interesting, the whole thing, the north-south kind of thing, because in the fifties when I came up here there wasn't much of a scene down there. I came up here because I thought this was where artists who really were doing stuff were and then I went back down there because things were coming along pretty well, and of course there were the people I was closest to aesthetically who were around the old Ferus, yet I always kind of preferred living up here. I think anybody in their right mind would prefer living here to Los Angeles, but it's changed a lot down there. It's become a pretty big scene down there, a lot of different kinds of art, lots of galleries now. I don't think it fulfilled the promise that it maybe had in the early sixties. It's gone up and down, but it's still, not compared to New York, maybe, a big incredible scene, but I would say it's second easily. And with that, the city itself is not as nice a place to live. I have always said I would rather live in San Francisco over Los Angeles or New York, where I divide my time now.

Jim:

It seems to me that what happened in Los Angeles was something that was very deliberately put together by just a very few people. It blossomed into something very big eventually. You said you felt there was a scene here, there was a kind of artist community in the Bay Area. In Los Angeles you (Craig) and Walter (Hopps) and Ed (Moses) and Ed (Kienholz) and the rest kind of had to create it out of whole cloth. It was a deliberate act to put that together. It became an example.

Craig:

I felt in the early sixties there was a suspicion of professionalism, like that was a terrible thing up here. I think we (in L.A.) took a different viewpoint, perhaps, of what was professionalism . . . it wasn't just commercialism. It could be a really clean space, that kind of thing rather than just being totally unprofessional about it and maybe there was a difference there but it was interesting hearing how there is perhaps still that kind of attitude of anti-professionalism in the Bay Area. I find that curious, I wonder why that is.

Jay:

I wish I'd been instilled with a little bit more of a professional attitude as a young student. I had to learn it the hard way.

Ron:

That was the thing about L.A. Really. You had to have the right storefront, you had to have this sort of Japanese aesthetic (Laughter) . . . I mean when I went down there, I'll never forget it. Ed Boreal

would try to sneak me into people's studios . . . I remember seeing Larry Bell's studio. Everything was covered with sheets. And everybody's work was top secret, you know, and if you weren't part of the clique you didn't get to look under the sheet.

Jay: Where did I hear that before?

Ron: Probably from me. I mean it was really weird, you know. But I thought, "Wow! These guys are real serious, because everybody was all so worried about somebody else ripping off their ideas."

Jay: It never occurred to me that I had anything to protect.

Ron: Maybe it was like the emperor's new clothes. Maybe there was nothing under the sheet in several cases . . . Did you have sheets, Craig?

Craig: I always had a pretty clean studio. I guess I was notorious for that, but I guess we're talking about different aesthetics, because I remember when I came up here with Walter (Hopps) in 1953 or 1954 and we went to 9 Mission Street. That was quite an experience. Everybody was in those studios down there. It was a different kind of thing, but there was a kind of mystical-whistical quality to that whole scene.

Jim: It was serious though.

Craig: I think that was the take . . . that I still think I relate art to, that sometimes there's the take that it's really serious business, that it's "the real thing." And when you feel that, I think it's different, a different kind of experience, and I'll never forget that first visit (to 9 Mission) . . .

Jim: What is the basis for criticizing anything today? Do you still have enough confidence to go on your own ability to discern what you're seeing, to know what's good and what isn't?

Ron: Yeh, I think so.

Jim: You don't feel anymore at sea than ever?

Jay: Well, we're forced into that position as teachers.

Jim: I wouldn't know what to do if I opened a gallery today. I wouldn't know what to show and what not to show. I'm confused. I tend to look at the same artists I used to look at because I'm familiar with it.

Ron: I think it really gets down to what you like, but it's based on years of looking at lots of stuff that's moved you. I think the idea of being moved by something, something being transcendent or taking you somewhere else, people don't know what that means. Presence, or whatever, these kinds of standards. I know that sounds like arty bullshit, but people aren't going for that. They're going for something else, they're going for a look or what's in . . .

Judy: What change do you see happening now?

Craig: The thing I find interesting about contemporary art, even though there seems to be a clear sweep at any one time of a certain style, nevertheless all this other stuff still goes on. I see this person or that person who has not changed very much, who are still doing their styles. Carl Andre is still stacking his bricks end to end and so forth. Carl's still around, you know. It's like in a sense they disappeared in one way but they're certainly there. Sometimes I feel a bit like that, like a living fossil.

Judy: But the conceptual artists of that period of time are continuing on, the ones that gained attention in the seventies.

Craig: But curiously, even the museums have this kind of extreme editing. Maybe they're in history books and so forth, but I saw a show called "From Minimalism to Expressionism" at the Whitney, and there was only one conceptual piece in that whole show. And it was like that was just suddenly edited out.

Jim: It should have been part of the story, but they decided not to include it.

Craig: Yeh, and I think that happens a lot. And there wasn't any sharp-focus realist painting. There's a very unfair view taken at any one particular time, I don't know exactly why. With the galleries it's obvious that it's not of any commercial interest at that point, but you wonder why a museum . . . Are they so close to the commercial interests these days?

- Jim:* I think they're all so interconnected that today it seems that the galleries have more power than the museums and the museums are deferring to that power, and that's why that could happen. I think it was perhaps the reverse, going back to the fifties and sixties. If there was any power, it resided in the wealthy patrons and the museums who seemed to be more connected to each other than they were to the artists or the galleries.
- Jay:* It's a very complex interrelated structure . . .
- Judy:* In terms of conceptual art would space be a factor? Because eventually they moved away from the concept of what space you would show in. People were using the deserts and the landscape for their concepts . . .
- Jim:* It seemed to me that a lot of these people were operating from a position of integrity very similar to artists in the fifties in a way, because they were denying the commercialism of the art world by refusing to make objects at one point.
- Craig:* Nevertheless, some of them have gotten giant grants, and they've been able to push themselves in that direction and deal with the possibilities from that direction rather than as a lonely artist rejecting commercialism. A lot of them have gone that route and it's paid off handsomely. Bob Irwin and James Turrell just got \$260,000 grants each.
- Ron:* Well, I think I'm going to change my bag (Laughter).
- Judy:* But there was a defiance, Jim has just mentioned, against what was going on that was very commercial, by some of these people, whether they're getting big grants or not, accidentally or intentionally, and that was really stimulating at some point.
- Craig:* I think there was a lot of sincerity to that kind of anti-commercialism, but at the same time I personally got such a terrible time about returning to painting, comments like, "another giant step backwards . . ." There was a sort of philosophical strong-armness about the whole thing that certainly rubbed me the wrong way.

Jim: I think Jay for a long time was sort of viewed as a conceptual artist.

Judy: When she did *The Rose*?

Jay: That's another way of looking at it. It's still my conceptual piece.

Craig: I remember when we lived on Fillmore there, coming over one day and helping you move it. Remember, you cut it out and then moved it?

Jay: We remounted it.

Craig: How many people were there that day? That was a giant undertaking.

Jay: Well, there was you, Wally (Hedrick), I think Mike McClure was in on it, several people. I decided I wanted a different format. I wanted it perfectly symmetrical or at least centered. That was before we stretched it to a larger scale so it couldn't possibly be removed without taking the wall down.

Craig: When I think back nostalgically that was one of the centers, not only the various locations of the old Dilexi, but that one location on Fillmore with the four apartments that people kept exchanging and moving in and out of. A lot of people came through there.

Jay: Earlier in the conversation that's what I was referring to, when, particularly at Christmas, we just closed up the studio or just threw in the towel and just opened the thing to general festivities so to speak, and the whole art world did pass through those portals, three or four hundred people at a party, for instance.

Judy: What's interesting about that time, I came in at the very end, but there were poets and writers and people like that involved in your scene.

Jay: (Michael) McClure lived in the building.

Judy: How did that affect you? Some of them were very close to the artists, and there was a lot of interaction between the poetry that was gaining a lot of attention and the artists here.

Jay: Well, whether I sought it out or not, I became kind of a poet's painter.

Craig: I think that goes back to the idea that the amount of people dealing with poetry and painting at the same time was such a small number. It just wasn't that big, it was the only scene in town. I remember, I was a pretty square kid living up here at that time, you know, looking for something to do, we'd go over to North Beach and go to the jazz and poetry and hang out at the Co-Existence Bagel Shop. And I didn't really fit into that scene, but I became acquainted with all those people very quickly.

Jay: That was another function of the cooperative galleries too, (Allen) Ginsberg and his *Howl* at the Six Gallery and stuff like that, where that kind of activity couldn't possibly go on at a more established conservative kind of gallery.

Craig: Personally, in my aesthetic I wasn't so involved with that, but some of the artists from L.A. really were . . . George Herms and Wally Berman moved up here and spent some time up here.

Jay: Well, they were the original kind of multi-media guys too, which is more typical of the artists now.

Craig: They were also involved in the old Ferus, so in a sense we were talking about a pure aesthetic that really came along a little later, but there was still a lot of variety to what was shown in both Jim's gallery and in the Ferus in Los Angeles.

Judy: Well, Jim's gallery still didn't have a particular look. It showed a variety of different artists.

Jay: The only common denominator was quality.

Ron: It was quality, I guess that's what I meant as far as stance goes.

Jay: It was a class act, Jim.

Ron: One of the things worth talking about also is the gallery on Clay Street and the consideration given to the artists' wishes about how they wanted the show displayed, how they wanted the show promoted, what they wanted the flyer to look like. We had a great time. We had stuff on buses, phone answering

machines. That was a ball. It was like carte blanche, no matter how crazy the ideas to promote the show. That would be unheard of today. If you want to paint the walls of a gallery, even if it's the same color, I mean the gallery owner flips. So I think the freedom with the artists' involvement in how they saw their own presentation is really worth mentioning, because you don't see that too much today. Today it is, "You're the artist. We put on the show." There was never that attitude from Jim . . . Hey, by the way, do we get a chance to look at the transcript so that if we've offended people we don't completely deep-six our careers? (General laughter). END OF TAPE.



GUI DE ANGULO

Double Portrait

Co-founders of the
Dilexi Gallery, c. 1958
Bob ~~Anderson~~ and
Jim ~~Newman~~

Alexander



Craig Kauffman

Prune Face, c. 1958
oil on canvas