

From the endless stream of materials that constitute our environment David Mach constructs a hybrid art which reflects the preoccupations of our era. His mesmerizing environments expand our definition of art towards a realization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of "Gesamtkunstwerk", or the total work of art. His art lies in a provocative combination of social and political critique challenging the viewer to interpret binary layers of meanings and demonstrating that social consciousness can be addressed creatively. The works are monuments to a material culture that is consuming itself yet remains hungry and unsatiated; works criticizing our culture by incorporating the very objects commented upon.

The installations/sculptures are constructed on location from materials of special interest to Mach, such as tires, magazines, furniture, and bottles. Large quantities of these surplus materials are made available to the artist from a variety of sources. Interested in relating his experiences to the population-at-large, he began choosing everyday objects, mass-produced by industry, transforming them into other recognizable images through simple methods of stacking and layering.

Mach first developed his concept of massive temporary public sculpture while still a student at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Scotland in the mid '70s. It was at this time that two important factors happened to influence his work. First, he took occasional jobs as a factory worker where he saw mundane and repetitive tasks being performed in order to produce massive quantities of items for a consumer society - a mode of working which eventually affected the types of materials he used in his own work and the ways in which they are deployed. This interest led him to begin dealing with the new meanings assumed by an object when it is removed from its original context. Secondly, at this time, he became frustrated working in a studio atmosphere with traditional artists materials. Abandoning the art institution to work outdoors, he started responding directly to the environment and to whatever materials were at hand. In *Aylith Sawmill* (1977), he appropriated the refuse from a sawmill, layering and stacking it to respond to the surrounding landscape. A year later he created a piece in Camperdown Park in Dundee which was a suspended carpet approximately 15 meters long woven of fallen leaves gathered in the park. This piece provided Mach the opportunity to work in front of an audience where he began to appreciate elements of performance such as his accessibility as an artist to people's ideas, comments, and questions. It was also his first opportunity to make one object out of a large number of identical elements.

Upon his arrival in London in the early 1980's Mach began making his pieces from mass-produced quantities of objects, the first being a life size reproduction of a Rolls Royce constructed from 15,000 books, then a miniature Eiffel Tower made out of unsold copies of the London entertainment magazine *Time Out*. Just two months after his graduation from the Royal College he was offered a show at Lisson Gallery in London where he was presented with a new set of criteria - the commercial gallery at its setting. While solicitous of certain sculptural conventions Mach's work is fundamentally subversive of

galleries. Even though he was uncomfortable with the gallery setting and the notion of a fixed object, he decided to take on these challenges and began to think in terms of an object with a permanent form. Once again using magazines as his media he erected *Reclining Figure*, which referenced the image of a reclining nude in art history. Later that year (1982) Mach made a small permanent object for the first time in many years: *Kinskihead*, a stylized head of the German actor Klaus Kinski made out of thousands of red and blue wooden matches. While still unsure about working on this scale or working for the consumption of a collector, Mach was eventually delighted with the final outcome of the work when it accidentally caught fire in the owner's home and was saved only by throwing a bucket of water over it.

During the mid 1980s Mach experimented with making sculpture out of stacked rows of bottles filled with liquid and various colored dyes to form emblematic images; images only recognizable when viewed from certain vantage points. Mach likened this experience to being able to "model with water". In *Man Overboard*, rows of bottles formed a flowing river-like configuration with the image of a man floating face down. Thinking of England was a depiction of the Union Jack with a secondary image of a nude woman lying on her back with legs outstretched in sexual anticipation. In the mid-80s Mach moved from smaller scale commercial gallery installations back to large scale work. During the British Sculpture survey held at the Hayward Gallery he produced a scaled down version of a Polaris submarine out of six thousand rubber tires, 180' in length (half the size of the real thing). Again he realized the importance to his work of interacting, not only with his environment, but with the public around him.

By the glorious physicality of simple placement and overlapping of dull, uninspiring, and conventional material Mach has become a modern day Houdini who transforms cheap items and base materials into images of vitality and substance. He weaves, stacks, and lattices his materials into large works creating specific shapes that mimic a variety of familiar objects such as columns, waves of smoke, and staircases as in *In Fuel for the Fire* (1986), *Natural Causes* (1987), and *A Million Miles Away* (1988). He has recently started orchestrating his constructions more abstractly adding ornamental objects such as inflatable seals and life size replicas of dalmatians, commanding attention to both the individual components and the overall image.

The work produced at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago is predominantly formed of magazines and newspapers loaned by a local circulating company and daily newspaper. The process of creating the piece involved not only the employees at the company and the gallery, but negotiations with seven magazine distributors and the volunteer participation of the general public and student body to help assemble the actual work. Upon completion of the project the sixteen tons of magazines and newspaper will be returned, re-accounted for, and recycled by one of the three companies in the country which performs the difficult, costly, and timely job of recycling magazines by stripping both the clay coating and the color from each page.

The sculpture involves the total environment, from floor to walls, in which the spectator participates in the actual fabrication

of the work and becomes aware of the events that occur during the creation of a David Mach sculpture. These ... a ten day period. The site becomes part and parcel to a solution within the parameters Mach has set up for the project. Although physical restrictions are inherent to his process, they do not comprise the power of Mach's pieces; as he works with the space as opposed to in the space. He finds the logistics of juggling materials, space, architectural components and people a constant challenge.

Certain concerns were investigated by Mach in the work at Gallery 400: 1) the examination and dissection of the act of making art, in particular the process of audience involvement and collaboration: 2) the use of materials and their potential as metaphor and symbol: 3) the ramifications of the massive over-production of consumer commodities: 4) and finally the examination of language in terms of a transmission of information. It is through Mach's unusual use of cast-off materials as medium that he illustrates his concerns about serious social (language), political (environmental), and cultural (socially interactive) issues. Rather than being a typical activist, Mach activates "political" issues by means of his art.

It is inescapable in this day and age that people are irrevocably tied to the media; magazines, television, radio, etc. Many artists who wish to comment about the media generally use TV as their reference, but Mach had chosen to comment on media using magazines. Life in our information society is mediated and has become homogenized by the tremendous volumes of information we receive. Mach illustrates how the media creates the illusion of being present, therefore making us think that we care. In reality, the overwhelming amount of information we receive makes us less concerned. Although information is received, it does not necessarily translate into people taking action and in essence is a more distancing device. The magazines also no longer communicate the ideas originally intended, but have become fragments that act as a catalyst to form a new discourse. The original use of the magazines has been violated therefore transforming the vocabulary. The viewer, in a sense, is victimized by being denied access since in their new format the magazines are unreadable, taking on poetic irony by the nullification of the original use. They become just another glut of non-usable information suggesting that language, not the magazines, may be the "true" debris of our society. By stacking volumes of magazines Mach also produces installations that re- and de-construct accepted notions of language and narrative. He transforms the magazines to evoke a state between language, thought and vision.

Mach's work exists in a special place between static and performance art. He wishes to challenge the hermetic nature of art; to reveal what is generally considered a private act, and to place it within a broad public format. Through his collaborative process he is able to encourage a dialogue about such matters as intent, content, technique, and process, divesting himself of the singular privilege of working alone in a studio.

The process by which he creates his installations is as important as the final work itself. Mach acknowledges that the artist is not independent, but rather dependent on people and institutions for

continued production. His work is an exercise in democratization as he involves people who might never enter into the realm of the arts or create art themselves. The works focus on the dynamics between artist, community, corporations, and art agencies. Mach acts as orchestrator, director, and coordinator with those involved.

These works are designed to expose both our fate and our folly, calling our attention to the many problems and tragedies created by global waste, consumerism, and mass-production. With the proliferation of objects and the speed of technology by capitalist production we are by our own hand becoming defenseless against the surplus and overflow of objects we have created. By the reconstituting of materials Mach gives them a temporary dispensation from oblivion in order to criticize the environmental jeopardy we are placing ourselves in.

Mach insists upon the viewer seeing and knowing that discarded and banal objects, such as magazines, can be re-objectified, redefined, and revalued. In his installations the overwhelming accumulation of objects is both beautiful and repellent, gaining effectiveness through the friction of these opposing terms. He teaches us to see that beauty and heroicness exist beside the destructive and the dastardly. The magazines he appropriates are hallmarks of our contemporary reality. They are man-made, disposable, replaceable, mass-produced and in many aspects made generic by their sheer volume. His work is aggressively concerned with re-joining and re-generating units of pre-existing things in order to overpower the audience into understanding the role which these objects play in our life and our future. He asks that the viewer be reminded of the production, the labor, the value, and the history of the object; as the context of the object is inextricably part of the power of the piece.

By re-integration into a new system the magazines have an evolution and revolution of purpose. Even before Mach's use of the magazines they are inscribed with cultural values. For Mach they provide a physical means of reflecting language and function as metaphor of self and society as they act as cultural memories. He addresses the privileging of an art object through a rear-guard reaction to the art object as commodity. The installations represent transition from material culture to visual culture, taking on a richness of new meanings with a multitude of interpretations. His art is a feast for the eyes and the mind. The works are memorable as artistic, analytical, and organizational achievement. They are the epitome of a perfect oxymoron as they make waste attractive.

Karen Indeck