

A Perspective of the ART/LIFE Continuum

One of the sociological phenomena of the 19th century was the advent of newspapers, journals, and periodicals, and with them, the impressive proliferation of images as illustrations in the journals. Indeed, this profound and explosive exposure to images was one factor that caused late nineteenth century artists to begin questioning their role in society, the content and the need for their own images, and eventually the importance and even the definition of art. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that artists began creating their own journals and periodicals, and when artists did adapt themselves to publishing techniques the results were remarkable. Not many years into the century it seemed that almost no avant-garde movement could form without publishing a manifesto of some sort, expounding its opinions and stating its intent to the rest of the world, which sometimes reacted with little or no interest. Along with the self-published manifestos came periodicals that groups would compile with great enthusiasm for a few issues, then abandon when the originators or contributors lost interest. The combination of artists and periodicals were usually short-lived, but these publishing tendencies have carried through to the late twentieth-century where the quality and longevity have improved. One of the longest continuously produced artistic journals, called ART/LIFE, is published in Ventura by the man who conceived it in 1981, Joe Cardella.

ART/LIFE is an artists' collaborative periodical that is published eleven times a year by Cardella. He began it as a four-page newsletter to friends and fellow artists in Santa Barbara in a need to communicate with other creative people. He had moved to California in the mid-70's after having been active in the New York art scene, and found the landscape here beautiful but the mindscape barren. He stated the purposes and intent of ART/LIFE to be a means of visual communication between artists, establishing his belief that art was life, and life was art, existing together in a continuum, with no difference or separation

between them. The message was heard and in answer to his first statement Cardella has been receiving hand-treated pages of original artwork for thirteen years from people in the United States, Canada, Japan, South America, Asia, and Europe. The first issues were produced in an edition of thirty-five; today each issue is a limited edition of two-hundred. Cardella lovingly nurtures the publication by supervising the advertising, editing, collating, binding, and distribution each month while also managing to make his own contribution to each issue.

On the cover, beneath the title, is a reminder that this periodical is the original limited edition monthly. There is also a slogan declaring ART/LIFE to be communication for the creative mind. Inside, at the back of each issue, are a few pages that give potential subscribers and contributors necessary information. Here, as a means of attracting artists and soliciting contributions, Cardella has another slogan: "Become a Page in Art History in Your Own Time," he says. The implications of this slogan are multifold, perhaps even multifarious. There is the suggestion that an artist will evoke a page in the history of twentieth-century art, when it is written. There is also the implication that by assembling and contributing the two-hundred identical pages needed for one month's issue of ART/LIFE, an artist will participate in the lasting influence of the periodical itself.

For the cover of the November 1991 issue, Cardella designed the "ART/LIFE Family Tree," the roots shown as being from the Dada and Surrealist traditions. In published statements Cardella has always asserted this lineage.

The Dada periodicals were legion. Marcel Duchamp published his first in 1917. It was called *The Blind Man* and was done in collaboration with Beatrice Wood and Henri-Pierre Roché. Actually, Duchamp and Roché enlisted Wood to name herself as the publisher because they weren't

American citizens and were leery of breaking postal regulations because of their foreign nationality. **The Blind Man** was offset printed on inexpensive paper, was not much more than a newsletter that had an article or two, and an illustration or two, some poems, and some advertisements. On the cover of the first issue was the statement that "The second number of **The Blind Man** will appear as soon as You have sent sufficient material." It seems that from the beginning Dada publications relied upon contributions from interested parties. Duchamp declared that anything would be published in his magazine as long as a submission was accompanied by \$4.00 to cover the cost of printing it. The second, and last issue, carried Duchamp's now famous defense of his own anonymously submitted "Fountain," the porcelain urinal cum sculpture that rocked the art establishment in 1917. Apart from this article though, the content was not substantial. **The Blind Man** may not have lasted long, but it was influential, especially on other Dada artists and activity. Picabia, who had been involved with Steiglitz and **291**, was responsible for one of the longest-lived Dada publications called, **391**. In Europe **Cabaret Voltaire**, **Dada** and other cheaply printed periodicals carried the voice and images of the movement. Kurt Schwitters published **Merz** for a couple of dozen issues, but they were like **The Blind Man**: offset printed in large quantities and, while innovative in appearance, were not terribly substantial magazines nor particularly unique. The mass-production method used by all precluded any hands-on participation by artists and there seemed no attempt by any of the Dada publications to include collage elements or other features that would have made these periodicals works of art in themselves.

Minotaure was the major Surrealist publication, but it wasn't particularly an artists' collaborative venture. Begun in 1933 by Albert Skira as an art and literature review, **Minotaure** was closer to being an esoteric scholarly journal, featuring articles by and about Surrealist artists and art. There were also articles about art of the past, especially historical styles that could

be viewed as having had an important influence on Surrealism. For example, nearly one entire issue was devoted to the art of the Dogon people of Mali. Even with the written contributions of artists, this journal cannot really be considered in the same vein as the Dada periodicals because of its large circulation and "mainstream" look. There were commercial advertisements, reviews, columns, and articles that gave **Minotaure** a feeling of being in competition with other newsstand offerings. The aspect by which this was a collaborative journal was that Skira asked a different artist to design the cover for each issue. When Skira detailed his idea of this forthcoming publication to Pablo Picasso over lunch one day, Picasso became terribly excited. He went back to his studio and immediately cut up one of his prints of a minotaur and constructed a collage that became the first cover. The list of artists who were invited to contribute cover art is a Who's Who of the international Surrealist scene: Picasso, Dali, Duchamp, Ernst, Derain, Miro, Masson, Magritte. As innovative as this cover art was, the magazine still never gained a large enough readership to warrant its continued publication, and it ceased after only thirteen issues in 1939. On the "ART/LIFE Family Tree" cover, Cardella has included **Minotaure** among the roots of his publication. Though there is little similarity between **Minotaure** and ART/LIFE, the spirit of Surrealism certainly lives on in Cardella's periodical.

The real spiritual parent of ART/LIFE is the 1960's movement, Fluxus. There is something of a fad now for Fluxus, major museum exhibitions and publications having generated increased interest during the past four years or so. It is somewhat ironic that the group was nearly ignored in America in the 60's and 70's but the ideas, publications, and performances they originated have had endless reverberations since the time of the inception of the group by George Maciunas. From the beginning, one of the stated intentions of Fluxus was to create publications that were limited editions of the art made by the group associates. The Fluxkits and Fluxboxes were multimedia presentations that were filled with a number of variously

formatted two-and-three-dimensional works. Technically defined as multiples, not really periodicals, these boxed presentations were intriguing conglomerations that allowed for imaginative and innovative work to be included, although it may not have been standard in format. These Fluxus kits and boxes derive from the most wonderful of all "art in boxes," Marcel Duchamp's minaturized retrospective exhibit, "Box in a Valise" of the 1940's.

One of the consistent additions to almost all the Fluxus boxed series was the latest copy of Maciuns' periodical **V TRE**. This newspaper-like serial had many manifestations over the years, but was consistently outrageous in appearance and content. Different Fluxus members would add their own artwork, articles, poems, photographs, etc. to be printed on the four or eight pages. Using Dada-esque typography, collaged layouts, off-center design, and other non-standard printing techniques, the pages of **V TRE** were haphazard but pleasing compositions of images and text. The title came from an earlier publication by George Brecht, a Fluxus associate, who was inspired by the letters of a partially burnt-out neon sign. Over the years the **V TRE** name went through a number of variations but the letters V-T-R-E were always present. cc V TRE, ccValise e TRianglE, Fluxus cc fiVe ThReE, Vaseline sTREet were some of the variations, but all were numbered as editions of **V TRE**.

Cardella was involved, tangentially, with a couple of members of Fluxus. In the early 1970's, as a young and experimental artist living and working in New York City, he became associated with a newly opened performance space called "The Kitchen," and there he met and worked with Alison Knowles and Yohimasa Wada, two very active members of Fluxus. For Cardella it was a vibrant and seminal experience.

Coming from a major art center to a relatively small town, Cardella moved to Santa Barbara in 1978. Feeling completely isolated and out of touch with experimental art, or any art for that matter, he wrote a

statement that became the first issue of **ART/LIFE**, mailed it to friends and acquaintances, and received sufficient responses to encourage him to continue.

The format of the magazine is 8-1/2 by 11 inches, which has been invariable from the beginning. There is a three-color requirement, meaning that a submission cannot be merely a straight or unaltered photocopy. The artist must hand-color or attach something to the page to qualify it as being hand-made. Now the number of the edition is two-hundred, which means that the artist must reproduce his or her page as consistently as possible two-hundred times. The editor encourages creativity, and because the subheading of the title is "Communication for the Creative Mind," Cardella likes to see artists responding to things they have seen in previous issues or to events in the secular world. Cardella attempts to exploit this dialogue establishing relationships between pages that are similar in content, composition, and/or color. There is never an announced theme, but frequently current events result in a few or several simultaneous submissions that deal with the same theme. For example, in the fall of 1991 several artists did pages relating to Christo's Umbrellas project, and in the spring of 1992 a number of artists did personal responses to the Los Angeles riots.

Not only has **ART/LIFE** provided networking capabilities for artists around the world, it has also proved to be a wellspring of inspiration for similar periodicals. The first was **eye** magazine, a Santa Barbara based spinoff by a man Cardella had hired to edit **ART/LIFE**. Due to energetic solicitation, the issues of **eye** attracted an impressive array of local talent. Finding that there was not a large profit to be made, **eye** disappeared from sight after only a few issues.

A New York clone called **Artworks** was started in 1983, lasting a couple of years. In 1985 a Japanese clone using the same **Artworks** name was started and is still published. **Artworks** Japan has evolved into a quarterly boxed presentation that includes videos, audiotapes, artist's books,

small sculpture, and page art. It is impressive, but is priced out of the range of any but the well-to-do, costing \$250 per box. Another international clone is **Eins von Hundert**, a German periodical started by frequent ART/LIFE contributor Peter Krabbe. **Eins von Hundert** has passed its seventh anniversary.

ART/LIFE is not the only artists' publication on the contemporary art scene. There have been many appearances in the 70's, 80's and 90's. Probably the closest comparable journal is from the **International Society of Copley Artists (I. S. C. A.)**. Begun in 1982 by Louise Nederland of New York, the journal was originally published monthly, but after a few years reduced its schedule to quarterly. Devoted to the photocopy machine as an artistic tool, **I.S.C.A.** promotes artists working with this technology. Nederland publishes a theme and format for the upcoming issue in each quarterly, so the appearance changes. Probably the most exciting aspect of this varying format is the annual book issue, in which the artists submit small, unusually formatted artists' books.

In Italy a man named Vittorio Baroni publishes **Arte Postale**, a periodical for and about mail-art and artists. Published erratically, this offset printed journal is of high quality and features innovative graphics, and tipped-in and hand-stamped additions. As interesting as the magazine is the package it is mailed in: the envelope is decorated with stickers and stamps and is a work of mail-art itself.

Atlas is another offset printed periodical, published only a few times in England by Jake Tillson. For this journal invited artists design a page which is then reproduced in an edition of 2500. **Atlas'** pages also involve hand-pasted elements, die cuts, artists' books, and some editorial material. One of its unusual features is a collage kit, which the reader is encouraged to execute and then mail in to the editorial staff, which then arranges an exhibition. Irreverent, splashy, and non-conformist, **Atlas** has tremendous potential. ART/LIFE also has potential. Although it certainly goes through

slumps when the contributions aren't great in number and/or quality, there are always a few pages that are interesting and engaging. Probably the most consistently impressive issues have been the anniversary issues that mark the end of the calendar year and the end of another volume number of ART/LIFE. From the first anniversary, which was a boxed edition, to the most recent (the thirteenth), the anniversary issues are always fuller, brighter, and more interesting than the rest of the year. Some artists contribute only to the anniversary issues, while some regular contributors save their most ambitious pieces for the year's end.

Non-contributors frequently question the motivation for contributing to an endeavor of this nature. No one is paid; each contributor, whether he has done an art page or a poem, gets a copy of the issue in which his work appears. Financial return is not a motivation. The reason most people do their first page, and then stay on to do twelve or twenty or forty more, is that the magazine provides a public arena for one who may not have another way of having his art displayed. This is not true for all artists; some are exhibited in their own localities. But for those who have no other outlet, or even for those who do, there is an implication in contributing which Cardella makes in his solicitation slogan: "Become a Page of Art History in Your Own Time."

How might this promise be answered for an artist? There are many ways, but primarily it is by dint of participation. ART/LIFE is one of the most successful and longest-lived artists' periodicals of the twentieth-century. When the history of the art of our century is written ART/LIFE will surely be included, perhaps somewhere between the publication activity of Fluxus and the explanation of artists' books, so that artists who have contributed will occupy a place in this history. It may not be as much as an entire page, but it will be a space earned deservedly as the result of creative diligence and perseverance and participation in the ART/LIFE continuum:

art equals life and life equals art.

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