

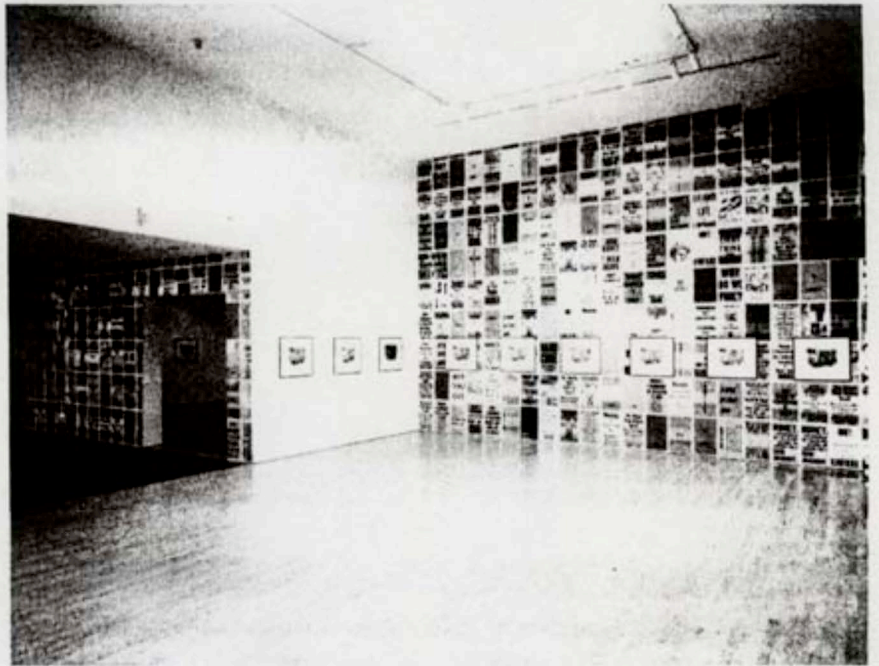
LOS ANGELES

Language and the act of reading are central to ALLEN RUPPERSBERG's work. (*Margo Leavin Gallery, March 7—April 14*). Many of his past installations have included books, or transcribed text, requiring the viewer to "read" the works in the show. A maker of objects, as well as installations, Ruppertsberg explores themes of art, collecting, and high and low culture in his recent work. In 1978, as a conceptual art work, Ruppertsberg planned to create an autobiographical novel based on theories from E.M. Forster's "Aspects of the Novel," which was about the technique of fiction. For the project "The Novel That Writes Itself" Ruppertsberg sent out a request to his friends and supporters for their participation in his work. One could be a character in the project for \$50 (a minor character) to \$300 (for a leading role), and each character could activate themselves in relation to both Ruppertsberg and the plot. The "novel" was planned as a series of drawings and paintings, but turned out to be a growing collection of commercially printed posters that were created over a 15-year period. Ruppertsberg began exhibiting the posters in 1997 and has continued to expand the series and reconfigure the installation since then.

For this exhibition he covered the walls with over 1,800 of the brightly colored posters. The wall begs to be read. Although it is impossible to read every sign on the wall, upon close examination patterns of repetition reveal themselves as each of the posters was printed 50 times. The texts range from announcements for exhibitions to single words and phrases like: "he," "is lost," "its not art," "drawn from life by A. Ruppertsberg," "translated by A. Ruppertsberg." Also included are numerous endings to "Honey, I rearranged the collection..." ranging from "...while you were gone," "...because I am looking for a good argument," to "...show that we are nice people."

Many of the commercially produced posters are in bright neon colors, others black text on a white or single colored ground. They are the kind of poster one usually sees on telephone poles announcing rock concerts, boxing matches or religious events. The posters become an overwhelming wall of information. The texts within the posters are the texts for the novel. When Ruppertsberg realized he had written 50 texts in the form of the posters, he realized the novel had written itself. In keeping with his original concept, the support characters (people who contributed money to support the artist's endeavor) appear in name as well as in image within the posters.

Shown in conjunction with the installation "The Novel That Writes itself" is "Honey, I Rearranged The Collection," a series of framed silkscreens on paper depicting the living room



Allen Ruppertsberg. "The Novel That Writes Itself" and "Honey I Rearranged the Collection" (installation view), 2001 (photo by Brian Forest, courtesy of Margo Leavin Gallery).

of a traditional home with fireplace and full library. The silkscreens are hung on the wall partially obscuring the posters and trying to reduce them to wall paper. Below each uniquely decorated image Ruppertsberg has hand scrawled the text "Honey I Rearranged The Collection" followed by more than 45 different endings. The ending and the alteration to the silkscreen often complement each other, adding another layer to this cutting exploration. For "Honey, I Rearranged the Collection after I returned from Marfa. When you go you'll know," Ruppertsberg drew a series of arrows from the interior of the print pointing out to the edges. A random arrangement of stenciled letters cover "... to let the artists speak for them selves. Critics hate that." Ruppertsberg attached smiley faced stickers to the surface of one print, he reversed another, and almost obliterated a third. According to Ruppertsberg, the silkscreens "are like New Yorker cartoons for the art world."

The installation immediately draws the viewer in and engages them on many levels. Formally the posters are bright and have bold text. Because there are so many of them covering the 25-foot walls, floor to ceiling, the viewer is both assaulted and overwhelmed. The two bodies of work complement and work off each other, one the subtext of the other. There is so much to read, but where to begin? Once the process of reading has begun, one laughs, thinks and immediately looks about the room asking what is this all about? Is he mocking me?

Ruppertsberg challenges his audiences by questioning their relationship with art and collecting. In one series he pokes fun at how one arranges work on the wall; in the other he presents an assemblage of posters, something disposable, mass produced and large enough to be the dominant work in any collection.

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