Robin Winters/MATRIX 106
Train of Thought/Objects of Influence
September 23 - November 19, 1989

I.D.E.A.S

Ideas (Travel Notes), 1975-77
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

MATRIX is supported by funds from Aetna Life and Casualty, the Lannan Foundation, and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Special funding for Robin Winters' Train of Thought/Objects of Influence and his Hartford residency was provided by the Visual Artists Forum program of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lions Clubs of Hartford and Litchfield Counties.
Robin Winters is a poet-insurgent. His distinctive persona among visual artists is in itself an act of resistance against all that he sees as ludicrous and unjust in the world around him. He meets the increasingly commercialized art world head on by intensifying his search for the ways in which an artist might provide comfort and direction to a society in spiritual disarray. In this shamanistic role he reasserts the magical and restorative possibilities of art. Yet, he has also located himself on the ramparts, energetically encouraging collaborative endeavors among artists and for a long while maintaining several union memberships that date back to the time of his youth. Despite the sophistication of his reading of society’s ills and the fierce intensity of his own feelings about the need for social change, Winters is sportive, gentle and ecumenical in his pursuit of a constructive role for art and artists in the context of a troubled world.

Train of Thought/Objects of Influence is the vehicle Winters has chosen to share with us a glimpse into the nature and the nuances of his own creativity. Not surprisingly Winters has a well-established reputation for an unusual degree of commitment to and respect for his audiences. He has prepared this dual-gallery installation hoping to provide a playful and engaging museum experience for both general and disabled audiences. In this effort Winters honors the specific intentions of the Lions Gallery of the Senses, which has been devoted to exhibitions for the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, wheelchair users, and other physically challenged visitors.

In the Lions Gallery Winters presents various aspects of his "train of thought." He has included a wheelchair-accessible shelf which runs around the perimeter of the room. On this shelf and on the brightly colored walls visitors will encounter a lively selection of "objects of influence" from Winters' workplaces in New York City and upper New York state. All hold a special meaning for the artist.
These include numerous pairs of objects including carved African figures, floppy puppetlike figures (Maggie and Jigs) from Winters' mother's childhood, and a very grand pair of dogs found separately on the streets of New York. There is a big black three-ring binder, also once discarded, containing the mysteries of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity in a braille translation. (In the early planning stages of this exhibition, when a member of the Lions Gallery advisory board attempted to translate a passage for Winters, the text was discovered to be yet more elusive than anyone anticipated. It is in German braille.) Some of these objects will be available to be handled.

Robin Winters in his studio, August, 1989
Photo: Beth Phillips

Two full walls are devoted to Touching Drawings (1988-89), a series of white braillelike monotypes of everyday objects that Winters made especially for this exhibition at the Experimental Workshop last year in San Francisco. In an unusual gesture, it is the artist's intention that visitors be allowed to handle these pristine monotypes. He welcomes into this body of work the physical evidence of a broadly shared tactile experience that will inevitably accrue by the time this exhibition closes. This room also includes some of Winters' recent experiments as a glassblower. He spent several weeks earlier this summer at the Pilchuck workshop in the Pacific Northwest.

There will be several participatory activities which Winters hopes will encourage the audience's own sense of play and creativity. A small room built inside the Lions Gallery will feature a one-way mirror which will alternate between a reflection of the visitor and a look at Winters' own childhood collection of antique bottles.
These "objects of influence" from Winters' studios are closely related to the second half of the exhibition, across Avery Court in the MATRIX gallery, which features nearly two dozen works of art. The dialogue between these two installations is a lively one. There are many intriguing congruencies between the objects in each space. Winters has made an audiocassette that intentionally takes liberties with the conventions of museum acoutstiguide. Winters also uses it to share with visitors some of the connections he sees between favorite "objects of influence" and his work in MATRIX.

Winters' antic love of hide-and-seek, shown in his repeated use of the one-way mirror over the years, is more subtly present in his recent Vermillion Years (1989), one of eleven similar works. Each includes a carefully crafted writing table (inspired by Victor Hugo's) with a small drawer containing several drawings and objects not on view to the public. At least once annually to the year 2000, Winters intends to add to the drawer items inspired in part by the individual personalities of the owners.

Invited to create a work in a private home in Ghent as part of a townwide exhibition, Chambres d'Amis, Winters quietly stole the show by making 90 drawings on vellum based on reproduced images found in the home library of a local art historian, one image per volume. He carefully placed each drawing inside the original volume, leaving the drawings to be discovered privately over time by the lucky owner. A set of copies of these witty drawings was exhibited in the sponsoring museum as the only clue to the activities that had taken place, and it is this set that is exhibited here as The Ghent Drawings (1986). The combination of reverence and irreverence that is so beguiling in the many recognizable images in The Ghent Drawings reveals Winters' own restless ambivalence toward the heavily historicized traditions of his profession.

Notions of accumulation and productivity are transformed by Winters into a parody of contemporary efficiency with his artist-in-residence assembly-line productions of Ceramic Knives, Pile of Bones, and Pile of Crowns. The bright yellow ceramic crowns of Pile of Crowns has a wry pathos, speaking as it seems to about the fragility of power, position, and symbols with images familiar to lovers of Babar and Queen Celeste. For Winters it also speaks of many different tales "of heads that have rolled along the way, of noble intentions and fallen dreamers." Multiple interpretations are encouraged, including seeing them as crowns of thorns and even as a pile of lotus blossoms.
The influence of the diverse eccentric objects that help fill the Lions Gallery exhibit is manifest in Winters' free-wheeling mix of unorthodox materials that has always been the norm in his work. Among many examples, consider the poker chips and rubber ears in Smoker/Clown (1974), the Seventh Avenue tags that hang loose in Style 38 (1981), and his use of canvas awnings or corrugated cardboard as a support.

To open up one's own creative process to a curious public, as Winters has done in this two-part installation, is a courageous act. Winters places on stage a range of vulnerabilities in works such as Painted in the Corner (1982) and Moment of Truth (1980). In the latter the artist-performer flirts with fear of humiliation and fear of death. Born Empty, Died Full (1982), with its epithet of quid pro quo ("this for that") is a declaration of Winters' genuine delight in what he has described as "the pleasure and privilege of being an artist."
Essentially Winter's vulnerabilities and triumphs stand for the vulnerabilities and triumphs of all earth's inhabitants. The effort Winters makes to communicate with us, in spite of the ever-present potential for surrender to melancholia, seems to be an offer to empower us. If Robin Winters could have his way, society would open itself to the magical and healing powers of art. Art might even help lead the way to fairness, kindness, generosity, and joy. Meanwhile, ever a realist, he croons his succinct jingle for each person's daily drama, "happy, sad, mad, glad."

Robin Winters was born in Benicia, California, in 1950. He dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen to travel to Alaska. In 1971 he resumed his formal studies at the San Francisco Art Institute. Winters joined the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York City in 1972. Winters was a co-organizer of Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Co-lab) and co-curator with Colleen Fitzgibbon of such exhibitions as The Income and Wealth Show, The Dog Show (with Diego Cortez), The Batman Show, and The Manifesto Show (with Jenny Holzer). He was the recipient of a New York State Council on the Arts grant in 1978, a National Endowment for the Arts individual artist's grant for conceptual projects in 1980, and an Englehard Award in 1985. He lives in New York City and Cooks Falls, New York, and is represented by Michael Klein, Inc., in New York City.

Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of Contemporary Art

NOTE: Robin Winters will deliver an informal MATRIX Afternoon Lecture, signed for the hearing impaired, on Sunday, September 24, 1989, at 2 p.m. in The Hartford Courant Room. At 3:30 p.m. the artist will meet with visitors in the exhibition area. Winters will be in residence, meeting with a variety of special-interest community groups, on Monday, September 25, through Wednesday, September 27, 1989.

Special thanks to Victor Velt, curator of video at Real Art Ways, for help in the production of Winters' videotape and to Debra Petke, acting curator of education, for assistance in the planning and preparation of this exhibition.
Works in MATRIX:

Smoker/Clown, 1974, poker chips, rubber ears, watercolor, gouache and ink on paper, diptych, c. 30" x 24" each.

Ideas (Travel Notes), 1975-77, mixed media on paper, 11" x 8 1/2". (Additional Travel Notes include: Abstract Waiter with Pencil Nose and Dirty Glass, Avenue of the Rolling Tent Mapped Out With Deadends and Escape Route, Bad Maniac Gets Shocking News, Dance Clubfoot, Deep Long Drink Rest, Face Reality, Far Out, Heart Head with Big Dick, Invention, Perpetual Motion, Peru, Rich, Stars in the Galaxy Hang by Wires, Tent in the Woods, U.F.O., all 1975-77, mixed media on paper, 11" x 8 1/2".

Portrait of My Father, 1977, fresco, 16" x 16".

 Burning Desire, 1980, mixed media on silk screen, 34" x 28 1/2".

Moment of Truth, 1980, mixed media on canvas awning, 54" x 44".

Style 38, 1981, mixed media on canvas, 54" x 44".

Born Empty, Died Full, 1982, mixed media on canvas, 72" x 60".

Painted in the Corner, 1982, powdered pigment, oil, acrylic, and graphite on corrugated cardboard, 49 1/2" x 63 1/4". Lent by Betty Keim, New York City.

The Ghent Drawings, 1986, pencil, coffee, and tea on paper, 69" x 112 1/2" (90 drawings, 10 framed parts). Lent by PaineWebber Group Inc., New York City.

Twins, 1988, handblown glass and painted wood, 9 1/2" x 15 1/2" x 8".

Pile of Crowns, 1989
Photo: Marion Gray

Pile of Crowns, 1989, glazed, low-fire ceramic, 100 pieces, dimensions variable, c. 8" x 12" dia. each.

Vermillion Years, 1989, cherrywood table, hand-blown glass vessel and at least one item to be added annually for the next eleven years; table, 37" x 24 7/8" x 19 13/16", glass vessel, 16 1/2" x 8" dia. The LeWitt Collection, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.
Works in Lions Gallery:

*Lump*, 1972, mixed media on canvas, 30" x 25" x 7".
*Surprised Dog in the Woods*, 1976, wood and cardboard. 20 1/2" x 6 1/2" x 6".
*Bookworm*, 1976, book, wire, plaster, paper, acrylic paint, 9" x 12 1/2" x 3".
*Table with Tablecloth*, 1986, wood, glass and silk screen on cotton, 30" x 36" dia.
*Touching Drawings*, 1988-89, monoprints and woodblocks; 50 monoprints, 12" x 9 1/2" each; 48 woodblocks, 12" x 9" each. These prints were made during Winters' residency at the Experimental Workshop, San Francisco.
*Ceramic Knives*, 1989, glazed low-fire ceramic, 150 pieces, dimensions variable, c. 12" each.
*Pile of Bones*, 1989, glazed low-fire ceramic, 50 pieces, dimensions variable, c. 10"-12" each.

All works of art by Winters in this exhibition are from the collection of the artist, courtesy of Michael Klein, Inc., New York City, unless otherwise indicated. Other "objects of influence" in the Lions Gallery include Winters' antique-bottle collection, a one-way mirror that he has used in a number of installations since 1977, and several dozen items of personal significance which the artist has had in his studio for many years. Included in the selection of objects are two "burning house" bricks by Tim Rollins + K.O.S., a wrapped heart-shaped book by Tom Ashburn, and a woodblock "radio" decorated by Kiki Smith.

Selected One-person Exhibitions:
San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA '73; Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, West Germany '75; Artists Space, NYC '76; Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY '77, '84; De Appel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands '77; Mary Boone Gallery, NYC '81; Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles, CA '83; Mo David, NYC '84; Art Palace, NYC '84; Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund, Sweden '85; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC '85; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA
*Robin Winters Think Tank* '86 (traveled to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, OH); Luhring, Augustine and Hodes, NYC '87; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA
*Robin Winters/MATRIX/Berkeley 109* '87; Michael Klein, Inc., NYC '87, '89; Brooke Alexander, Inc., NYC '88; Tyler Gallery, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Elkins
Park, PA Leaning Missives, Floating Vessels ’88; The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia, PA ’88; 42nd Street and Broadway, NYC Messages to the Public sponsored by Public Art Fund, Inc. (computer animation for Times Square Spectacolor light sign) ’89; San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA A Month in San Francisco ’89; Willoughby Sharp Gallery, NYC Performance Installation ’89.

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Richmond, CA Richmond Painting Annual ’71; Emanuel Walter Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA Game Show ’72; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT Contemporary Reflections ’73; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC Biennial Exhibition ’75; Collaborative Projects, Inc., The Times Square Show, NYC ’80; P.S. 1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY Critic’s Choice ’81; Marlborough Gallery, NYC Pressure to Paint ’82; The Alternative Museum, NYC Face to Face ’82 (traveled to Real Art Ways, Hartford); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX The Americans: Collage 1950-1982 ’82; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA Image Scavengers ’82; Brooklyn, NY The Terminal Show ’83; The New Museum, NYC Difference: On Representation and Sexuality ’84; Artists Space, NYC Memory Jam: Retrospective Performance Series ’85; Museum of Modern Art, NYC Large Drawings ’85; Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst, Citadel Park, Ghent, Belgium Chambre d’Amis (In Ghent there is always a free room for Albrecht Durer) ’86; The Brooklyn Museum, NY Monumental Drawing: Works by Twenty American Artists ’86; Benefit for the American Foundation for AIDS Research, NY Art Against AIDS ’87;

Selected Bibliography about Robin Winters:


Deitch, Jeffrey. "Report from Times Square," Art in America vol. 68 no.7 (September ’80), p. 58+.


*Robin Winters Think Tank*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, (Boston, MA) 1986.

**Selected Bibliography by Robin Winters:**

"A Statement by Bob-E" and "Bob-E the Life and Times of," *Art-Rite* no. 6 (Summer '74), p. 20.