

ART SPHERE

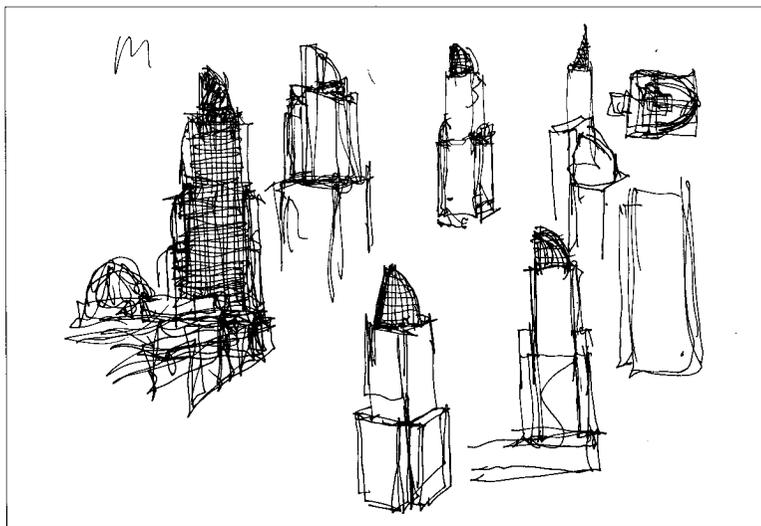
NEWSLETTER OF THE
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gehry EXHIBITION TOURS EUROPE

C/IAF INTERVIEWS

FRANK



Frank Gehry, Sketch for Madison Square Garden project

Frank O. Gehry is an exhibition of the work of the internationally known California architect, organized by the Architecture Museum in Basel, Switzerland. Gehry, winner of the coveted Pritzker Prize in 1989, is currently designing the Walt Disney Concert Hall for the Music Center of Los Angeles County, and was the subject of a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. He is also the only architect to have been invited to participate in the prestigious international survey Documenta, and is known for his close ties to the art and artists of Southern California. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

ZDENKA GABALOVA

Czech art critic Zdenka Gabalova and Los Angeles artist Barbara Benish have organized a two-part exchange exhibition, "DIALOGUE/PRAGUE/LOS ANGELES", which took the work of 15 Los Angeles artists to Prague in August 1989. The exhibition was documented by a full-color catalogue sponsored by Prague's M-Art Agency. In June 1990, 11 Czech artists will exhibit their work at L.A.'s Otis Parsons Gallery.

The L.A. artists are Kim Abeles, Dawn Arrowsmith, Barbara Benish, Mark Cervenka, Jim Uyekawa, Habib Kheradyar, Robert Kingston, Deborah Lawrence, Karl Matson, Leland Means, Christian Mounger, Andrea Nadell, Kirk Phillips, Jeffrey Vallance, and David Wells. The Prague artists are Michal Blažek, Tomáš Císařovský, Stanislav Diviš, Ivan Kafka, Vladimír Kokolia, Jan Merta, Vladimír Merta, Stefan Milkov, Tomáš Ruller, Margita Titlová, and Josef Žáček. Sarah Tamor spoke with Gabalova in February 1990.

ST: Have you been able to publish your work in Czechoslovakia? What is your background?

ZG: I have a PhD. from Charles University in the Theory of Culture. It's the oldest European university, founded in 1340, but

C / I A F T O H O S T C I M A M

In September 1990, C/IAF will host eighty members of the prestigious Comité International pour les Musées d'Art Moderne (CIMAM). It will be the first time this 25 year old organization has ever held its annual meeting in the United States.

CIMAM's membership includes approximately 300 directors and chief curators of the most distinguished museums in the world, including the Tate Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. CIMAM was founded to further international understanding and professional exchange. According to Thomas Messer, retired director of New York's Guggenheim Museum and a three-time president of CIMAM, "CIMAM offers a communication linkage which is the only way that Russian and Eastern Bloc museum directors have been able to interact with their colleagues, even in the darkest Stalinist times."

For instance, Dr. Ryszard Stanislawski, long time director of the Museum Sztuki in Lodz, Poland has been a CIMAM member for many years, and still actively participates in the organization. The Museum Sztuki, the oldest museum of modern art in the world, predates the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was begun solely by donations of work by leading artists of the time, including Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, Jean Arp, Georges Vantongerloo, Fernand Leger, Alexander Calder, Kurt

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in the last 40 years it deteriorated because it was dominated by the Communists. I have not been able to publish my work except in underground publications, so I have been working as a translator.

ST: Tell me about how you and Barbara initiated *Dialogue/Prague/Los Angeles*.

ZG: Four or five years ago Barbara came to Prague, and we met through a mutual friend, and we found out that we had so much in common. We actually started to think about some exchange then, but five years ago it was impossible to do anything like that. Then about 2 years ago, the situation was getting somewhat better, a kind of back door was opening so we tried to

police and interrogated about it. But then came the revolution, so...

ST: What was that interrogation like?

ZG: It's such a stereotype. They ask whether the American artists could be used for anti-Czechoslovak propaganda. They wanted to know about my contacts with the American embassy. It's this old scheme of counter-revolution coming through CIA and other agencies to Czechoslovakia. They've done this for 40 years. Any contact with abroad was a very suspicious thing.

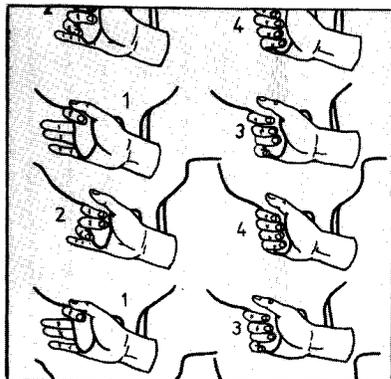
ST: Were you nervous, expecting this?

ZG: I wasn't that nervous, because we all kind of expected some big changes. The atmosphere in Prague already in August was changing. Of course it was heavily controlled by the Party,

tal sculptures of our leaders, or the state or museums would buy your stuff. You were not considered to be an artist without this union card. But there were many people who didn't bother about becoming members. Of course, they couldn't exhibit, they couldn't have their work reviewed in the press. No one actually knew about them, just the art community. They could never communicate to a broader audience. It was a really big frustration for them.

Tomáš (Ruller) graduated from the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, but instead of this Socialist-Realist stuff, he does these sort of moving sculptures, he works in the open air and puts mud and paint on himself. He several times had charges brought against him of "subversion of

ZDENKA GABALOVA



Stanislav Diviš, *Instructions for Milking a Cow*, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 1988, from *Dialogue/Prague/L.A.*



Tomáš Ruller in performance

sneak the show in. It took us a year to prepare this first round, to bring the Americans to Prague, which was ridiculous work to do in Prague, because you had to break through unknown territories. For example we got the money for the catalogue from the Union of Socialist Youth, which was really ridiculous, but we somehow managed. We also had them print thousands of posters showing the American flag and the posters were all around Prague this past August. It was the first time probably in 40 years when the American flag was publicly displayed in Prague. We had really many problems because of this poster. Of course we did it purposefully.

When the artists came to Prague, they were difficult for the police to follow all the time, they were so many. They didn't have a group of 12 artists there before. And of course they were watching our symposium. We brought them mainly to have a three-day symposium on American art, which was widely attended. It was attended by the police too, and they were watching us closely but they kind of chose not to intervene, and only after the Americans left I was summoned to the

and was still pretty conservative, but the mood in the population was changing.

About a year ago, people from the official structures came out and spoke openly against the regime. We used to have "official" and "unofficial", or "parallel" structures. The parallel structures were people like Charter 77, which was founded in 1977: artists and intellectuals who after joining the opposition could no longer work in their professions. They washed windows in the day, and did art in the night. For years Charter 77 was the only opposition group. That is why it was so important that this crop of independent intelligentsia came out about a year ago, because it was people from normal structures, the Academy of Sciences, the Union of Czech Artists, architects, performers who were on TV - people who had much to lose. They stood up and spoke out, because everybody has had enough by then.

ST: Was the Union of Czech Artists similar to the official artists' union in Poland, where if you're "good", you can get by, you can teach?

ZG: Yeah, you get State orders for monumen-

tal morality", once for a performance where he was nude, but invisible, lying in a sandpile in the dark. Another time for this performance which he did at the Barnsdall Theater, where he pours the red champagne over his head: the authorities thought this had something to do with the regime. He went on trial and was acquitted, but this is the typical pattern of harassment.

Tomáš is part of an international group of about 8 performance artists called "Black Market", and he had performed in West Germany and Poland and so forth, but when he was invited to be in Documenta 8 in 1987, his passport was revoked and he couldn't go. The Communists were very serious about groups like "Artforum", whose people were jailed for publishing independent magazines.

Tomáš was one of the artists who took over the Artists' Union at the outset of the revolution. This is a big complex with exhibition halls, and restaurants and printing facilities, and they established it as the Civic Forum information center. They printed Civic Forum posters and produced information booklets about what was

happening in Prague and set up a national network of distribution, because the state controlled the radio and tv. They organized taxi drivers and bus drivers and airline pilots to distribute this information all over the country. Otherwise no one would have known about the demonstrations.

ST: Czechoslovakia has a tradition of artists and intellectuals being involved in politics.

ZG: Yes, so perhaps artists are held in higher esteem than in America. In the last century intellectuals formed a group to preserve Prague. Prague is the largest surviving medieval city and it was dominated at that time by the Hapsburg Monarchy, with two languages, Czech and German. So the artists organized to preserve Czech identity, and the city was spared from the



Brandenburg Gate and Berlin Wall, from West Berlin. In silhouette, sculpture welcoming East Berliners. Photograph by Aaron Paley

demolition of buildings to make way for the large boulevards, as in Paris and other European cities. Also, Prague was not bombed in the war.

ST: What was the response to the Prague show and the symposium?

ZG: Oh the response was great: You have to imagine it was the first show of contemporary American art in Prague for 20 years. We had a thousand people at one opening, and another thousand at a second opening. We were exhibiting at 2 places at once, and we had huge everyday turnout at both galleries. People were simply hungry for any fresh contemporary American art. The Prague art community was so interested to meet the Americans, because America has been so intangible for years.

ST: Were you able to keep abreast of what was going on in the international art community?

ZG: In general, we were in this respect much less closed than it seems from here. We are really in the center of Europe and people could tune to West German and Austrian TV, to the BBC. And whoever travels abroad would bring publications home. Magazines like *Artforum*, and *Flash Art* have always been available in libraries. Not on newstands, mostly because they were too expensive for the government to import. But the artists were exposed to all this.

We saw Laurie Anderson here in L.A. and it was very interesting because I've seen her

Judith Teitelman, Director of Development of the Santa Monica Museum of Art, traveled to Berlin and Prague during the last week of 1989 and the first week of 1990. Her remarks are excerpted from a conversation in February 1990 with Sarah Tamor.

The Berlin Wall is like yin and yang. The West side is very beautiful, filled with murals and graffiti; the East side is white and plain. We saw the first graffiti on the East side, near the Brandenburg Gate. It said, "Berlin Grüssst California Über Alles": "Berlin Greets California Overall". It's like a pock-marked teenager, with all these holes from people chipping away at it.

On New Year's Eve, there were 400,000 people at the Brandenburg Gate; hundreds of people were on the Wall. It was just outrageous. Fireworks are a tradition in Germany on New Year's, and they started days before. On New Year's, everybody just went wild. From midnight to 12:30 it was 360 degrees around us, under our feet, it was the most intense experience. People were popping champagne bottles and passing chocolate; there were people from all over the world. People climbed 100 feet up to the chariot sculpture on top of Brandenburg Gate. The chariot used to face West, but about 20 years ago they turned it around to face East.

Being in Germany for the first time felt like a pilgrimage. We stopped in Cologne, which was really moving. My mother lived there before being sent on the last Kinder Project boat to England when she was six in 1939. She remembers when she was three, there was a big parade. They were on the third floor, and Hitler passed by, and she was all excited and her mother just whacked her. She didn't understand why. Then when she had whooping cough, her mother took her to the cathedral because they were paving the street there, and supposedly breathing the tar was a cure. So I've always wanted to see this cathedral. It's spectacular. It had been almost completely bombed out and they refurbished it. There was this chapel in the church, that was "für deine mütter", so I lit a candle for her.

She never saw her father again because in 1942 he was taken to a concentration camp. My grandmother and my uncle walked to Switzerland and were in a deportation camp. My grandmother was from Poland, one of 12 kids, and only she and 2 sisters survived.

Then in Prague, there was this incredible spirit: as an outsider looking in, I encountered a beautiful, unspoiled medieval city that was so magical because of this undercurrent of joy and happiness which permeated the place. Like nothing I'd ever experienced before - people were so free.

The symbol for the Civic Forum is a "happy face" with an F next to it: it was the first time the happy face ever made sense to me. It was everywhere, absolutely everywhere. Also, pictures of Vaclav Havel all over, in people's cars, in practically every shop window. There were memorials around the city to the people who fought for democracy and were in the demonstrations. There were layers and layers of melted candle wax and flowers and notes from people all over the country. It was very moving. It was tended by the students, the snow had fallen and still they kept the candles burning.

Our experience in Prague got more and more magical. Our last night there was Twelfth Night, and it's a tradition that the high school students go around and recreate Epiphany and the Three Kings. So you see different groups of Kings and carolers all over this medieval city.

Prague was one of the few cities that wasn't bombed in Europe. It's truly a jewel and you know at one point it was an incredibly wealthy town, the center of Europe. There are modern suburbs, though, and one night we went to see *Laterna Magika*, one of the main artist groups Havel worked with. That building is much newer, the kind of Stalinist architecture. But the actual city of Prague is one architectural masterpiece after another. It's breathtaking, with mosaics and murals and incredible sculptures. So you feel like you're 600 years in the past.

We met this 16 year old kid who was in the demonstrations in Wenceslas Square, when the police attacked the students, and he escaped by climbing over the rooftops. Here's this kid, fighting for his life and his freedom, and he was so proud — it was *his* freedom, he fought for it, he deserved it and he was going to really work hard to keep it. Like Tomás (Ruller) said about the artists' resistance: "It was the greatest fear and the greatest chance they could take," and they had no idea they could pull it off. Their success was the biggest shock to all of them. We constantly saw people gathering and talking about democracy, and Olga, the woman we were staying with said, "Yeah, they could never do that, you weren't allowed to gather before."

C/IAF TOURS OF LASCAUX CAVES AND BAY AREA

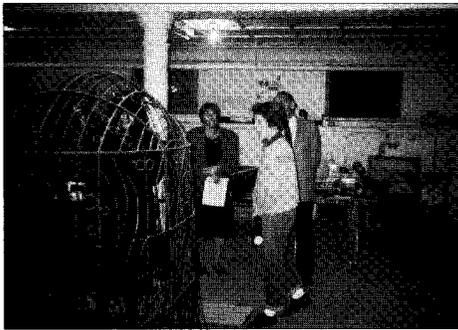
The C/IAF, in a remarkable coup, is able to bring some of its friends to the famed Lascaux Caves of France, which have been closed to the public for over 25 years. The tour, which will be led by Henry Hopkins, director of the Frederick R. Weisman Collection and former director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMMA), will also visit five other major prehistoric caves in the Dordogne and Perigord areas, from April 28 through May 8, 1990.



Dick Newquist, Fletcher Benton and Lou Newquist (left to right) at Benton's studio. Photograph by Lee Ramer

The astonishing images of the Caves of Lascaux were painted over 17,000 years ago, and are world-famous. They were re-discovered in 1940 by four boys playing in the woods where the caves had remained hidden for thousands of years. The tour will also include visits to medieval castles and fabulous culinary experiences.

In February 1990, ten C/IAF friends



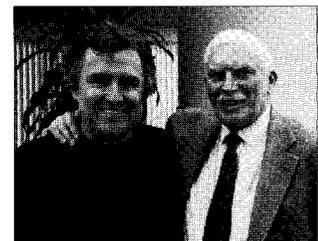
Henry Hopkins and Lee Ramer (behind birdcage) and Lois Ukropina, Ann Hamilton and Dick Newquist (left to right) at Headlands. Photograph by Mary Robinson

made a very special trip to the San Francisco Bay Area to view the C/IAF exhibition *Lee Miller Photographer* at the SFMMA. Henry Hopkins served as guide as the group visited artists' studios and private collections, with some first class wining and dining along the way.

Bay Area artists Fletcher Benton, Sandra Shannonhouse, and Robert Arneson graciously opened their studios to the company. Sculptor Manuel Neri's hospitality included lunch in his studio. Donald Hess of the Hess Collection, and John and Gretchen Berggruen shared their splendid collections with the group. And a swing through the Napa Valley included lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Jan Shrem at the Clos Pegase Winery, a stunning complex designed collaboratively by architect Michael Graves and artist Edward Schmidt.

Visiting the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County was another wonder-

ful experience. Headlands is an interdisciplinary arts organization located in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in eight former Army buildings. The spectacular site is the location of a unique artist-in-residence program which encourages the development of innovative work and provides artists with opportunities to redevelop the architectural spaces of the Center. For instance, David Ireland's renovation of the public rooms reveals the paint layers of 80 years, in a remarkable commingling of the old and the new. The C/IAF group visited with artist Ann Hamilton, at work renovating the kitchen of this unique establish-



Fletcher Benton (left) and Henry Hopkins. Photograph by Lee Ramer

ment. Ann was busy transforming an enormous old bird cage she had found into an element for the new dining area, formerly the mess hall.

Viewing exhibitions of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs and Jay DeFeo's drawings at the University Art Museum in Berkeley capped a full and fascinating weekend.

(GABALOVA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

only on video before. I was quite impressed and I liked it, but at the same time, this kind of performance is so much removed from our understanding of performance art. I enjoyed her "show" very much, but I wouldn't classify it as performance art as it's understood in Europe. In Europe now, performance art is moving towards a very minimal level of expression.

ST: Do you think that the work that they saw, and the experience of the last 4-5 months will have changed the work that the Prague artists are going to be bringing here?

ZG: I think they will simply be more relaxed about what they do. In the past they had to be so cautious not to be political because the official art was political, this plain message of indoctrination which they abhorred. Now there won't be that much haunting them.

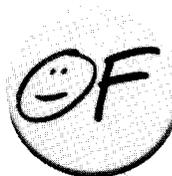
ST: What kind of work will we see here?

ZG: We plan to do it the same way we did it in Prague. The Americans shipped most of their works, but the biggest pieces were made there,

and actually stayed there. The National Gallery in Prague is interested in buying some of them. We will ship most of the Czech art here, but we would like them to make some pieces here. It's always nice to see site-specific work which responds to the environment. Tomáš will make all his work here, also Ivan Kafka who makes installations. These people represent different trends in Prague art, like a survey show.

ST: How do you think art will change in Czechoslovakia? Will commodity become more important? I read that Vladimír Kokolia, one of the Czech artists, said, "Collectors are a very rare obsession here. I don't understand it at all."

ZG: Yes, it's been a real luxury there for people to collect art, because only very few people could afford it. I'm sure there will be several new pri-



Civic Forum Button

vate galleries opening in Prague, and there are plans for a new museum of contemporary Central European art. But at the same time, the state will continue sponsoring art, of course in different way than before. We have to balance the art market with state sponsorship. There will be state sponsorship for a lot of things and still will be a welfare-oriented society, even though there will be a free market and all that.

ST: When Vaclav Havel spoke to Congress he talked about Central Europe joining the European Community, of all these countries being an integrated entity. How will that effect the arts? Will individual nationalities, ethnic and cultural groups tend to be overwhelmed?

ZG: I'm sure they will retain their original national character. I don't think that in 50 years we'll see a single Europe also in terms of arts and culture. I simply cannot picture it because there are so many cultural differences that actually make Europe interesting, and I think it would be a pity if they vanished.