

The Studio Art Movement

A perfect storm occurred in the mid 1970's. The Outsider Art movement started by Dubuffet in the 1940's in France crossed the Atlantic providing opportunities for sales and exhibition of self taught art in the United States. Simultaneously deinstitutionalization began in state schools for adults with developmental disabilities, eventually spreading to a broader movement including individuals with mental illness. Simultaneous to this Wolfensberger in 1972 developed and further promulgated the principle of normalization which had originated in Scandinavia, and then traveled to Canada, the United States and beyond, emphasizing the acceptance of people with disabilities offering them the same conditions and opportunities available to all other citizens (Wolfensberger, 1983). The concept of art had broadened with the Outsider Art movement and an emerging market had been created. This new field ultimately became a place for artistically talented individuals with disabilities to develop a working life in art.

Out of this fortunate configuration the studio art movement in America was born. Professional studio art programs were developed in California by Elias Katz and his wife Florence Ludens-Katz staffed by artist facilitators with backgrounds in human services. In these settings individuals with disabilities could develop their art, build portfolios, and sell their work. Creative Growth was the initial art center founded in Oakland, California by this team serving individuals with developmental disabilities with funding from the state of California for recently deinstitutionalized adults.

Gateway Crafts was started in Boston in 1973 as a weaving and pottery studio for ten individuals recently released from the state schools for individuals with mental retardation. It was initially funded as a day activity center with funds from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health created as part of a statewide class action deinstitutionalization mandate.

On the west coast the Katzs created two additional major art centers for people with developmental disabilities, first Creativity Explored in 1982 in San Francisco, California followed by NIAD (National Institute on Art and Disability) in Richmond, California. Work was shown in onsite galleries.

In 1990 the Katzs published a book describing their model for studio art centers titled "Art and Disabilities: Establishing the creative art center for people with disabilities" (Katz, 1994). By 2001 there were 25 studio art centers for individuals with developmental disabilities in California (Katz, 2002).

On the east coast growth of studio art centers was much slower, with Gateway Arts, emerging as a leader in this movement. Rae Edelson joining this small crafts service in 1978 for ten individuals, developed it into a model studio art service with a talented professional staff which ultimately served over 100 individuals (Edelson, 1991). The crafts program was relocated from a basement in Brighton, Massachusetts to a well lit studio space in historic Brookline Village, Massachusetts in a former glass factory, ultimately including both a professional onsite gallery and street level crafts store. The studio art program expanded not only in number of artists served, but in the types of art and crafts provided, ultimately including fine art, literary publications, and jewelry as well

as weaving and pottery. Its population developed uniquely in this movement to include individuals with all disabilities including pervasive developmental, psychiatric, head injury, as well as individuals with hearing and visual deficits.

These and other emerging studio art services throughout the world were described in a UN Division on Cultural Development (1981) report, prepared for UNESCO, including another east coast craft studio Spindleworks located in Brunswick, Maine, which currently has also expanded to produce fine art and publications. The National Arts and Disability Center based in California currently records 37 art centers for individuals with disabilities in the United States (<http://nadc.ucla.edu/VaCenters.cfm>).

We note that art centers for individuals with significant chronic psychiatric disabilities are not in evidence. With deinstitutionalization from state hospitals, art therapy is provided intermittently to people requiring occasional hospitalization and day treatment programs, as a therapeutic intervention to bridge people back into the community. Art activities are also offered in club houses which abound in the United States (196) and worldwide (400) providing consumer driven psychosocial rehabilitation for people with mental illness requiring continued support for 'recovery' (www.TheKentcenter.org/clubhousemodel.doc).

The paucity of supported studio art programs for talented individuals with significant psychiatric disabilities is world wide. Although some note is taken of the artistic merit and vocational potential of talented individuals with psychiatric disabilities in England (Spandler, Secker, Kent, Hacking & Shenton, 2007), the focus is again on

art as an aspect of recovery rather than as an area where individuals can achieve some success in art as a profession.

However Anchor House in Northampton, Massachusetts with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (MDMH) has provided a studio setting with sales opportunities for artists with significant psychiatric challenges (Tillyer & Accordino, 2002). They have consulted with Fortune House, one of the first clubhouses in the United States, located in New York City, to provide similar art sales opportunities to talented individuals with chronic psychiatric issues in that region.

Gateway Arts with funding first from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) expanded its services over 20 years ago to provide training to artists with all disabilities including psychiatric, and helped individuals develop portfolios, resumes, and a history of exhibits and sales that enabled them to continue with careers in the arts on a part time basis once their studio supports had ended.

Susan Spaniol (1990), a Boston based art therapist with interest in exhibiting work by artists with psychiatric challenges, emphasizes the ethical issues involved in exhibiting art by people with mental illness while recognizing that art by people with mental illness has begun to enter mainstream American art through the prominent outsider and other galleries. However her emphasis is on the clinical issues involved in showing this work rather than focusing on the professional/sales aspect.

This focus on art as a primarily therapeutic activity for talented adults with psychiatric illness is orthogonal to the Outsider Art movement which focuses on art for

arts sake and welcomes self taught artists with and without disabilities into the mainstream of art sales.

Therefore in the rehabilitation field Outsider Art and its market have held, so far more promise for individuals who are self taught and have developmental disabilities coming out of the studio art centers than individuals with psychiatric and other non intellectual challenges. There is a certain paradoxical element to this observation since the art brut movement and the Prinzhorn collection became an important basis for the outsider art movement and initially represented work that was largely done by individuals in mental hospitals (Spaniol,1990). However these works were 'found' and not generally promoted as a means of vocation. Compensation was non-existent to rare for the individuals who had created this outstanding art such as Martin Ramirez and Henry Darger, with value created often long after these individuals' deaths.

Studio art centers for individuals with disabilities in fact allow for creative expression and exhibition, plus sales and careers for artists who attend. Artists are paid from 50-75 percent of the sales price of items and generally hold copyright and reproduction rights, obtaining additional compensation for multiples or reproductions of their work. We must recognize however that from a normative point of view, artists are rarely able to totally support themselves through art sales. So there is validity in questioning this as a primary career choice for the larger population of talented adults with psychiatric illness capable of significant recovery and employment in the mainstream. However, we must note that studies have found only approximately between 8- 15% of people with severe psychiatric disabilities enjoy part-time or full-time

employment (Tillyer & Accordino, 2002). Therefore studio art centers could also have some significant role for this population to supplement the existing vocational rehabilitation venues.

Leadership was shown in Massachusetts by the state agency MRC when it funded studio art services at Gateway Arts to enable artists with mental illness to develop careers in the arts. As early as 1990 this agency funded first a few individual artists and then opened up the opportunities for additional individuals such that during a 20 year period over 100 individuals with disabilities, with a concentration on psychiatric, were able to receive studio based training to develop their careers, MDMH then partnered to provide longer term supports to some of these individuals until budget constraints ended this funding two years ago.

MRC still provides these opportunities at present to eligible artists with psychiatric and some other disabilities to receive training in the studio art setting.

A small number of the initial artists with psychiatric illness that were part of the original studio program funded by MDMH and MRC continue to attend Gateway through private payment or fundraising outreach. Other individuals not eligible for state funding attend on a private pay basis.

Very Special Arts (VSA) offers unique opportunities to artists with any disability through their state wide, national and international programming. A study of young disabled artists who were finalists in VSA Volkswagon of America Inc. sponsored competitions 2002-2005 emphasizes the role of university training and mentoring and supports the notion of career development in the arts for artists with disabilities but with

little emphasis on studio art programs (Boeltzig, Sullivan-Sulewski, & Hasnian, 2009). In this broader population, artists with intellectual disabilities were not a focus. It should be noted that artists with formal academic training would not be sold in the outsider art market, which represents self taught intuitive artists. The facilitation offered in the studio art programs is not considered formal training.

Clearly funding has been made available by state agencies across the United States and beyond to some emerging artists with developmental disabilities that enables them to pursue careers at studio art centers as outsider artists in a way that is not largely available to most artists with severe chronic psychiatric illness, as well as other disabilities.

As the field of Outsider Art grew, opportunities for exhibit and sales for artists in the studio art programs for people with primarily intellectual disabilities grew beyond their onsite venues. The Collection de l'Art Brut was established in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1971 showing art by self taught artists in a permanent collection from all over the world. Judith Scott and Dwight McIntosh, two outstanding intuitive artists with disabilities who worked at Creative Growth, are represented in this acclaimed venue.

In 1992 the first International Outsider Art Fair was held in New York City and thereafter annually providing great exposure and sales opportunities for studio artists with disabilities as well as a broader population of self taught individuals. It currently exhibits and sells work from 38 different dealers around the world including prestigious venues in the United States such as Ricco/Maresca and the Cavin Morris Gallery in New York, the Ames Gallery in Berkeley, California and the Berenberg Gallery in

Boston, MA. Creative Growth has been represented at their own booth the past few years. The Berenberg Gallery has shown work from studio art centers such as Gateway Arts, and Spindleworks. In 1996 the American Visionary Museum was founded in Baltimore Maryland to exhibit American outsider artists including some exemplary artists from the American Studio Art Centers.

The American Folk Art Museum in New York City has a contemporary collection curated by Brooke Anderson that includes self taught art by well known outsider artists such as Henry Darger, the deceased self taught artist from Chicago, and some artists from Creative Growth, including Judith Scott, also deceased. This institution is intimately connected with the annual Outsider Art Fair.

Gateway Arts

Gateway Arts will now be the focus of the description of career development for three artists with a variety of disabilities including developmental, psychiatric, and spectrum disorders. The impact of the studio art program as well as these emerging artists' intersection with the field of outsider art and more broadly professional art in developing exhibit and sales opportunities will be detailed.

Yasmin Arshad born in 1975 lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is a part of a large family consisting of art collectors and art makers. Prior to joining Gateway's studio art service in 1996, she showed an early interest in art and color, especially

shades of blue and had devised a personal way of sequencing color into grids. Her family's support of her interest in art and art materials, which had an obsessive quality, is not atypical of families of individuals with spectrum disorders who have idiosyncratic verbal and social communication and special talents in art as a means of expression and communication.

Because of her distractibility there was a need for one to one attention to facilitate her art making. Funding for one to one attention for facilitation was necessary beyond the group day rate provided by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Disabilities and was provided by her family.

Yasmin is a self taught artist who is by nature an art maker. She has her own iconography, uses numbers and letters and words in her work as well as line figurative drawings and is fascinated by repetition, sequencing numbers and the millennium.

From her entrance into the studio program it was clear that her work would develop and be welcomed into the outsider art market. Over a period of five years her work developed sufficiently such that it was able to be exhibited and sold widely.

Her work has been shown at the Gateway Gallery in Brookline, Massachusetts, the Berenberg Gallery in Boston, MA and in New York City at the Outsider Art Fair, the Phoenix Gallery and Cooper Union. Yasmin is a prolific artist who has received much commercial success at the Gateway Gallery and store. Her work has been sought by collectors of outsider art both established and new. It has been reproduced from an original water color as a note card and mug. See figure one.

We now include material compiled and written by Scott Alberg, a senior Gateway Arts studio facilitator from an in-house publication which reflects the results of Yasmin's sponsorship in a three year grant from the Shapiro Family Foundation which enabled her to get additional focused facilitation to take her artistic career to the next level.

"Yasmin has always integrated her numerous obsessions with her art. Constantly occupied with notions of time, numbers, names, and colors, Yasmin has developed a body of work over the years, which participates in many of the stylistic characteristics of Outsider Art while at the same time being entirely original and new. While her use of color and her idiosyncratic application of line can both charm and seduce the viewer, what makes her art so significant and important is the way she manifests her enjoyment of and conviction in her daily obsessions with the objects she creates. Counting and a highly subjective notion of time are at the core of Yasmin's work. She receives great joy in the activity of listing the years chronologically, starting with the year 2000, over the course of many sheets of paper, or asserting the number 129999 as a kind of ultimate chronological idea (129999 represents all of the months and all of the years in one number). The majority of Yasmin's work is a very controlled and considered a working through of her obsessions, which often employs the grid or a predetermined use of color (Yasmin has certain colors that she only likes to work with).

Entering into the Shapiro Grant, Yasmin's most pressing challenge was the way in which she easily gets sidetracked from her artwork and would tend to persevere on non-productive ideas. During these moments one saw Yasmin drift from utilizing her obsessions in the making of her art. She instead would let these obsessions take her

away from her work. The goal set was to focus her on her obsession with time and calendars. Watches, calendars, and other “time-related” supplies were given to Yasmin to work with. She began to create assemblages with these materials, decorating wooden boxes and other objects with them. Yasmin was very taken and involved in this work, and did not get distracted as she often would in other studio areas. There she would be drawing out her ideas into grids and lists, while during her Shapiro Grant time she was working directly with the material objects of her obsession.

After a couple of months, Yasmin began to integrate into her assemblages more and more materials, specifically wire, wood, and found objects. It became clear that a new and different body of work was slowly emerging, characterized by its improvisation and spontaneity. Her portfolio has grown very deep and is full of unexpected works which integrate a variety of found objects and engage in the third dimension. In the past Yasmin was content to work primarily on paper, or to treat found objects as a mere ground for what she wants to draw. Now she approaches her art making with a more materialist approach where the object or thing is just as important as the drawing. Her art is highly personalized in this way, whether it is on paper or sculptural. There is a sense one gets when working with Yasmin that to a certain point her art is an extension of who she is as a person. Clearly art making is very important to Yasmin, as both a way in which she can visually express her ideas of the beautiful and profound to the world, and a means through which she can manipulate, control, and make something out of the time and materials that constitute her everyday life“ (Alberg, 2007).

Yasmin has developed a career in art over the 14 years she has attended the Gateway studio art program. She has developed professionally, matured as a young woman, and has enjoyed the exhibition, and sales of her art as has her welcoming family and the avid collectors interested in her work. Yasmin is an art maker, an artist. It is her vocation, art is her language, and her art is who she is.

Bohill Wong was born in Hong Kong in 1934 and died in Boston in 2004. He came to the United States when he was 34 years old in 1969 and lived in a nursing home. He came to work at Gateway Arts in 1979 after being discovered in the nursing home, drawing on any scrap of paper that he could find by a professional from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation who recognized the potential of this quiet, self effacing man who presented numerous somatic complaints. Bohill's transformation from institutionalized individual to independent person was truly amazing. Initially his tolerance for attending and working was slight, but with successful experiences in the art program he was able to attend full time within a six month period. Mr. Wong drew almost constantly, originally drawing flowers and Chinese women in a traditional reserved representational form.

As his confidence increased, he developed an individual image making style that was humorous, sexual, with psychological elements and a tendency to anthropomorphize snakes, and household objects and dress them up in high heels. His work is entertaining, playful and profound. In a scene from his oeuvre (see figure 2), the wedding of a refrigerator and a toaster are accompanied by a snake combo band. This work was sold as a line drawing and reproduced as a best selling T-shirt.

Over his 25 year career at Gateway Bohill developed a confident and unique artistic style. He was prolific. He developed a healthy ambivalence to his joyous acceptance into the local and national art scene. He would at times demur praise and payments for his work. At other times he would suggest that articles in *The Boston Globe* (Morgenroth, 1994) were a nice beginning, but perhaps *Time* magazine should be next. He in fact was interviewed by *Time* but his piece was not ultimately published.

In Gateway Arts' early years as a comprehensive art center he was the star, exhibiting and selling work, receiving commissions and being avidly collected. His work has been shown widely in the U.S. and abroad at the Berenberg Gallery in Boston; the Fuller Museum of Art in Brockton, MA; Very Special Arts Gallery in Washington, D.C.; and at the following New York City venues: Cavin Morris Gallery, the Outsider Art Fair, the Cork Gallery at Lincoln Center, and the former Margaret Bodell Gallery. His work has been reviewed in *The Boston Globe*, on WBUR radio in Boston by Lynda Morgenroth and in *Arts Media*- a Boston publication. A biography on Bohill Wong, produced by Marty Ostrow (1999) on WGBH's Greater Boston Arts, won a New England Emmy in 1997. In this film, the author of the present paper states that "Art is the emotional striptease that gets down to the core of what is true about us." She observes that Bohill had this gift and in the process of his art work both touched others, and found himself.

Bohill had a successful career as an artist with supports from the studio art service at Gateway. As with many artists, his work lives on and continues to be exhibited. Multiples of his works continue to be carried in the Gateway Crafts store in

the form of witty aprons, T-shirts, night shirts, cards and an irresistible adult psychoanalytical coloring book with images from his work and text by a Gateway writer Rebecca Bella Rich (Rich, 1993). See figure 3. Excerpts from this book have been made into songs and are performed by a local singer/songwriting group.

Ruby Pearl was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts in 1949 and currently lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. She is the granddaughter of a housepainter who mixed his own paints; he used the leftovers to create country scenes on wood panels. She is a self-taught artist who won her first art award at age four, and has considered herself an artist ever since.

Ruby has been a participant in the Gateway Arts Studio program since 1998. At that point she was struggling with chronic mental illness and was homeless, living out of her car. She received funding from MRC to attend Gateway full time and soon found her way back to a life in art with her depictions of women experiencing not loneliness but solitude. The first piece she sold at the Gateway Gallery depicted a beautiful woman, alone in a lovely dress lying on a settee with the tools of her trade, paint brushes, looking out a window on a vivid landscape. See figure 4.

Since then she has gradually worked her way back to living in an apartment, and working and regularly selling her artwork. She states that the art center not only represents her career and earnings but helps her maintain her artistic equilibrium. Ruby uses collage and paint, acrylic and watercolor, to create worlds that she would like to inhabit. Her work has been widely exhibited and admired. In 1999, she was commissioned by The Mall in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts to design a 58 foot banner

for its entryway based on her first 'Solitude' piece of the meditative beautiful woman. Her work has received positive reviews in *The Boston Sunday Globe*, *Boston Magazine*, and *Yankee Magazine*, a New England publication. Joann Silver (1998), in the *Boston Herald*, states Ruby is "...a gifted painter focusing on the process of looking for something that lies far beyond what can be seen." She appeared in the national media for an initiative of hers to solicit artists to depict and donate art for an exhibit to commemorate the killings at Virginia Tech. She is an inspirational public speaker and speaks openly about her own post traumatic stress disorder, her recovery and the role of art in her own healing and balance as well as her career.

In her own words: (Pearl, 2009)

"Much of my art reflects my innermost self- the joy, fear, sorrow, and helplessness I experience while I continue to restore and bring balance to my spirit. I live for my art. It serves as a channel for putting broken pieces back together, for I am still a child striving to follow the quiet guidance of my own muses!"

Although Ruby is a self taught artist, John M. McGregor, an outstanding writer on self taught artists such as Henry Darger, Dwight McKintosh and others, on meeting Ruby Pearl at the Gateway studio program and viewing her work did not classify her as

an outsider artist. In an interview in *Arts Media* he states “Ruby’s work is good – it’s normal art. It would be a catastrophe if her work were lumped in with other artists with disabilities. Not every artist with a mental illness is an outsider artist” (Howards, 2003). Although Ruby is carried by the Berenberg Gallery in Boston, which specializes in outsider art, the gallery owner Lorri Berenberg does not show her work in traditional outsider art venues like the Outsider Art Fair. Ruby sells the work she produces at Gateway Arts and at her home studio primarily through the Gateway Gallery as well as privately, receiving many commissions for portraits.

Two years ago after having received continued studio support in Gateway’s services funded by MDMH she faced loss of the studio art program when these funds were eliminated.

Currently she has continued to receive funding for studio time on a regular basis with funds donated through an outreach by the Gateway Arts Advisory Committee and Gateway staff devoting time to development. These funds are solicited on an annual basis and remain a lifeline for Ruby as well as a way to sustain her career and stability as an artist with significant psychiatric challenges.

Pearl states “...with Gateway’s support I have sold almost all of my work. Without this support to help me become a successful artist, I am reminded of the days of my hospitalizations, homelessness and the many failed jobs during my years of mental illness. I am eternally grateful to find myself for the first time in my life a whole person with my first home and a place in the world and a peaceful heart of a successful artist. Gateway has allowed my life to become whole by bringing the most difficult

pieces together. I have become self sufficient here while creating art not from sadness but from pure joy” (www.tinyurl.com278usd).

The art center is crucial to Ruby; the studio supports, the colleagues and the representation. It is a delicate balance since her earnings are insufficient to fund studio support costs without fundraising. But Ruby’s perception of herself as an artist is shared by the people who underwrite her, and by the people who collect her work and by the media. She is an outsider, not unilaterally perceived as an outsider artist due to the nature of her work, but a working artist building her career in the studio art center as well as her life.

As we have seen, the configuration of the Outsider Art movement and the studio art movement in the United States and beyond as well as deinstitutionalization have provided remarkable opportunities for individuals with disabilities involved in studio programs to forge careers in the arts, receiving both the artistic facilitation and representation they need as well as appropriate supports for the disability issues they face. In these settings they are artists first, predominately outsider artists in the art market and artists with disabilities if you insist.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1: Yasmin Arshad, Untitled, 2009, marker on paper.

Figure 2: Bohill Wong, Untitled, 1985, ink on fabric.

Figure 3: Bohill Wong, Untitled, 1993, ink on paper. Caption by Rebecca Bell Rich.

Figure 4: Ruby Pearl, Solitude, 1998, acrylic on rag paper.

Figure 1

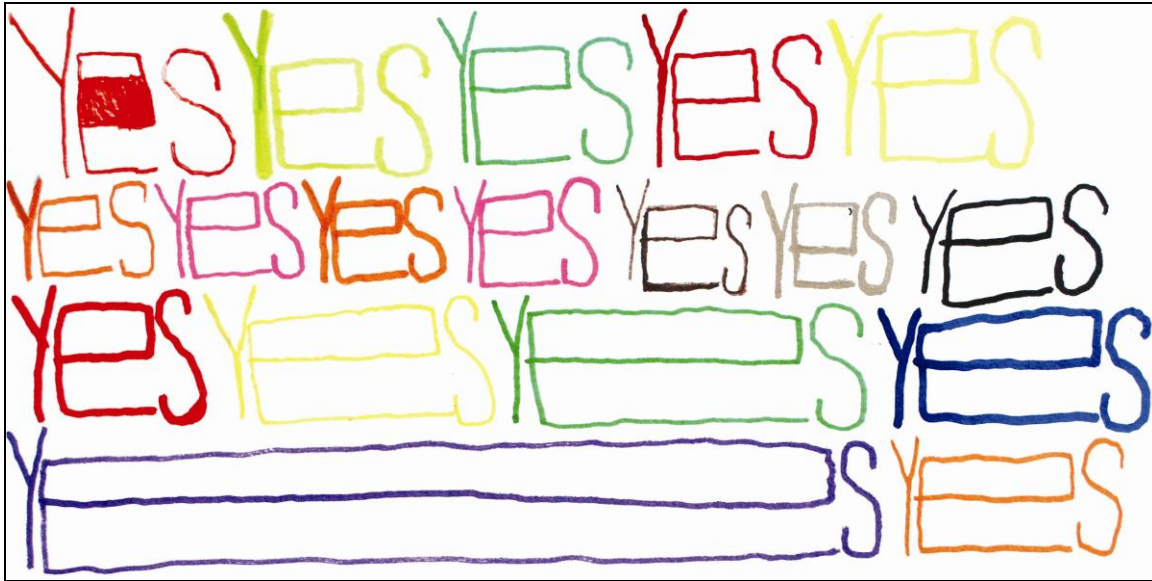


Figure 2

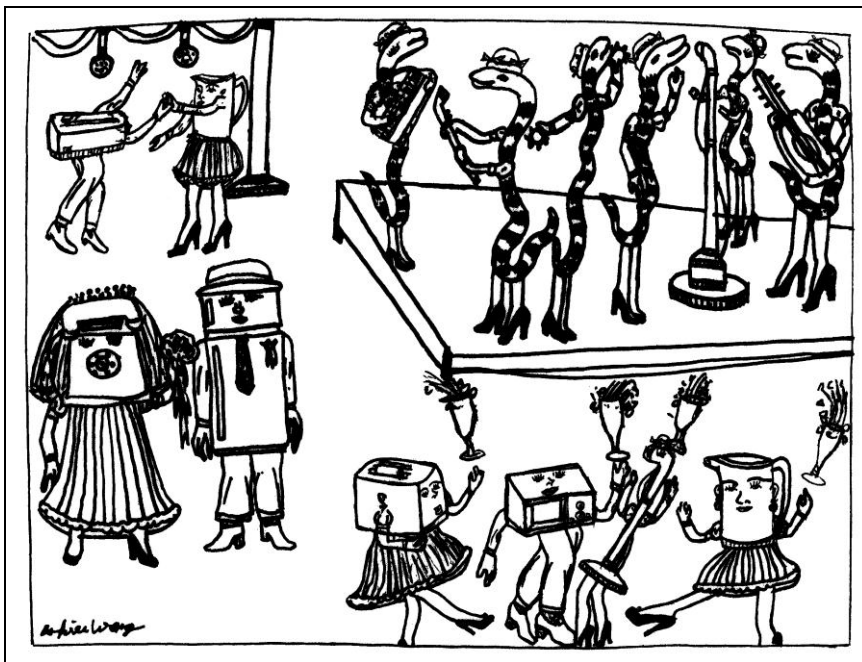


Figure 3



Figure 4

