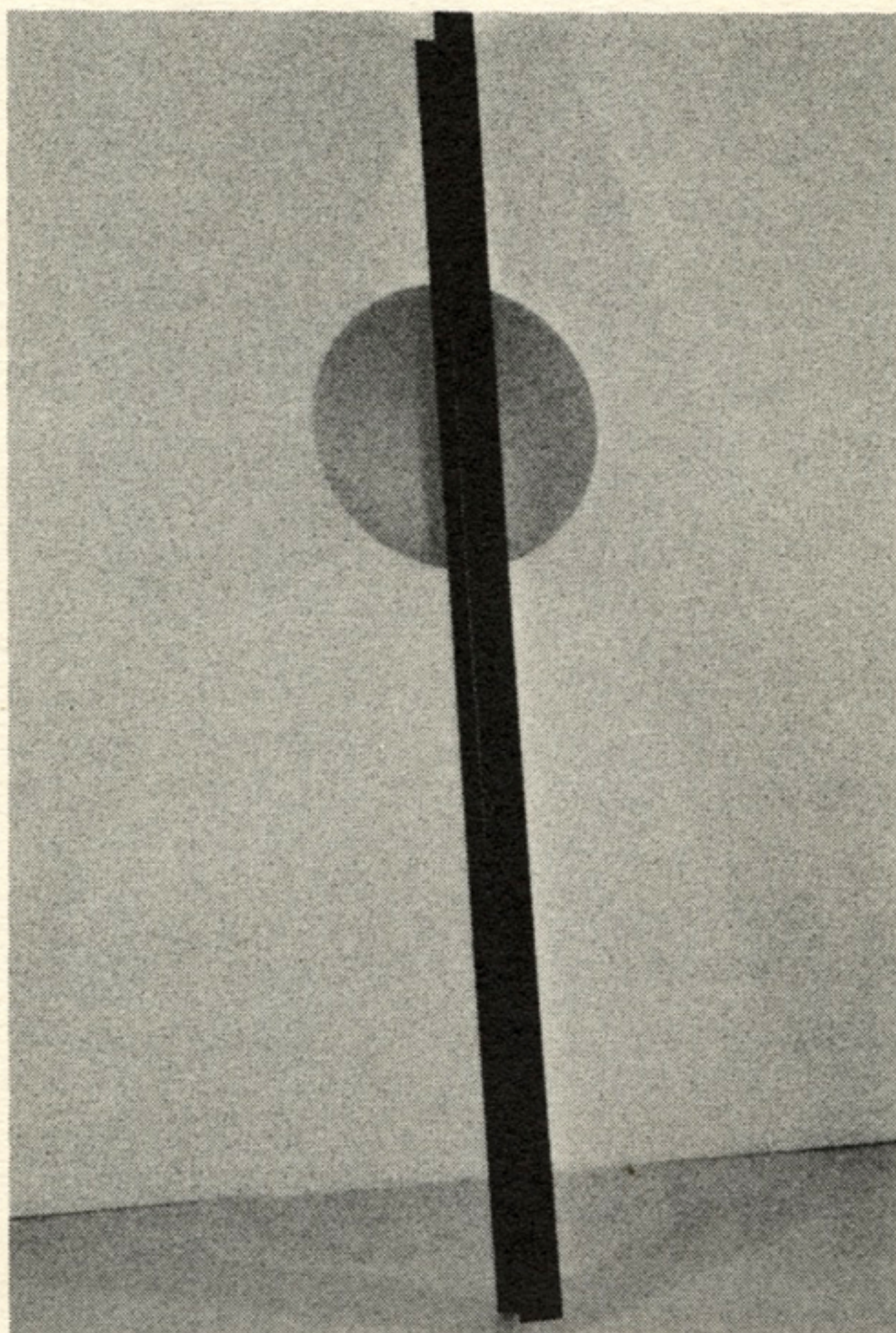
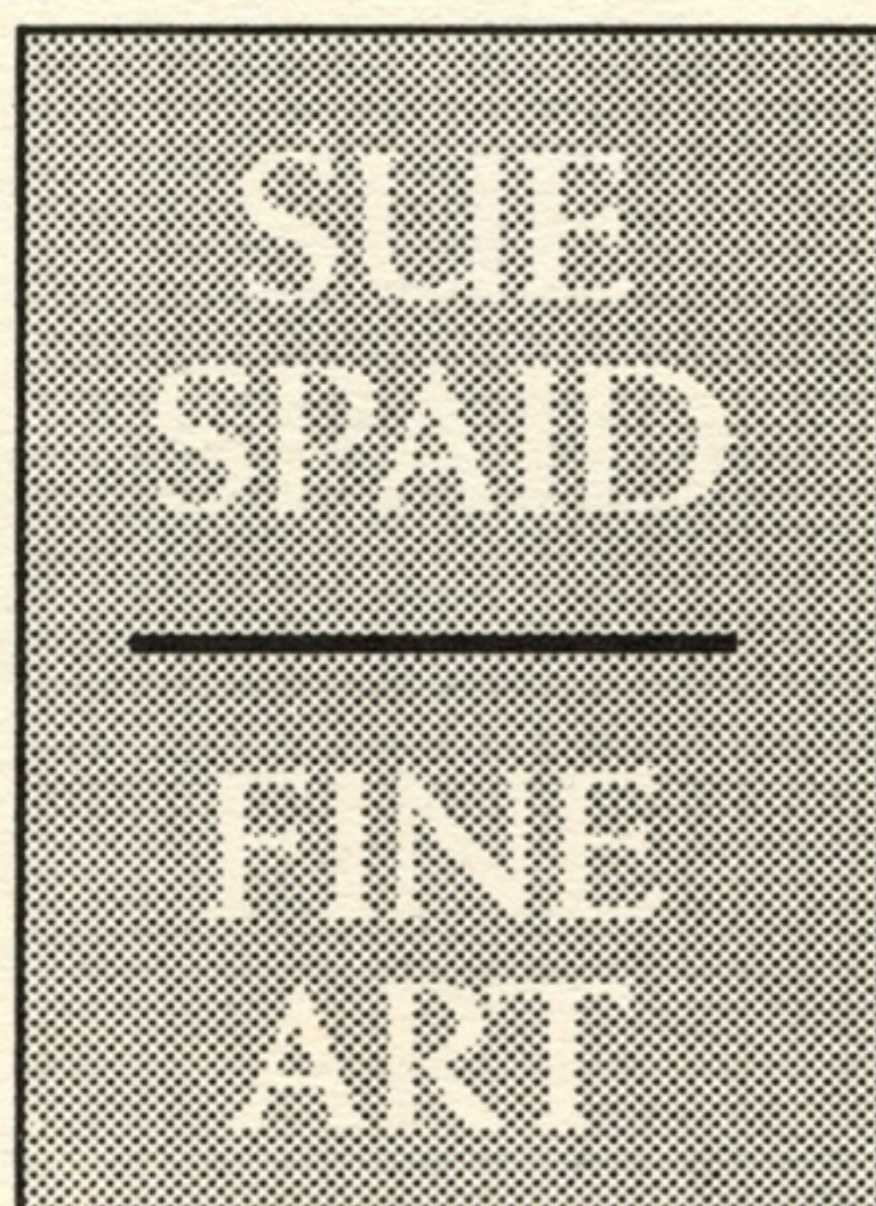


Carter Potter, "FAG Branding Iron", 1990 24"x15"x15"



David Schafer, "FFREUD", 1989 96"x24"



7454½ Beverly Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90036  
(213) 935-6153



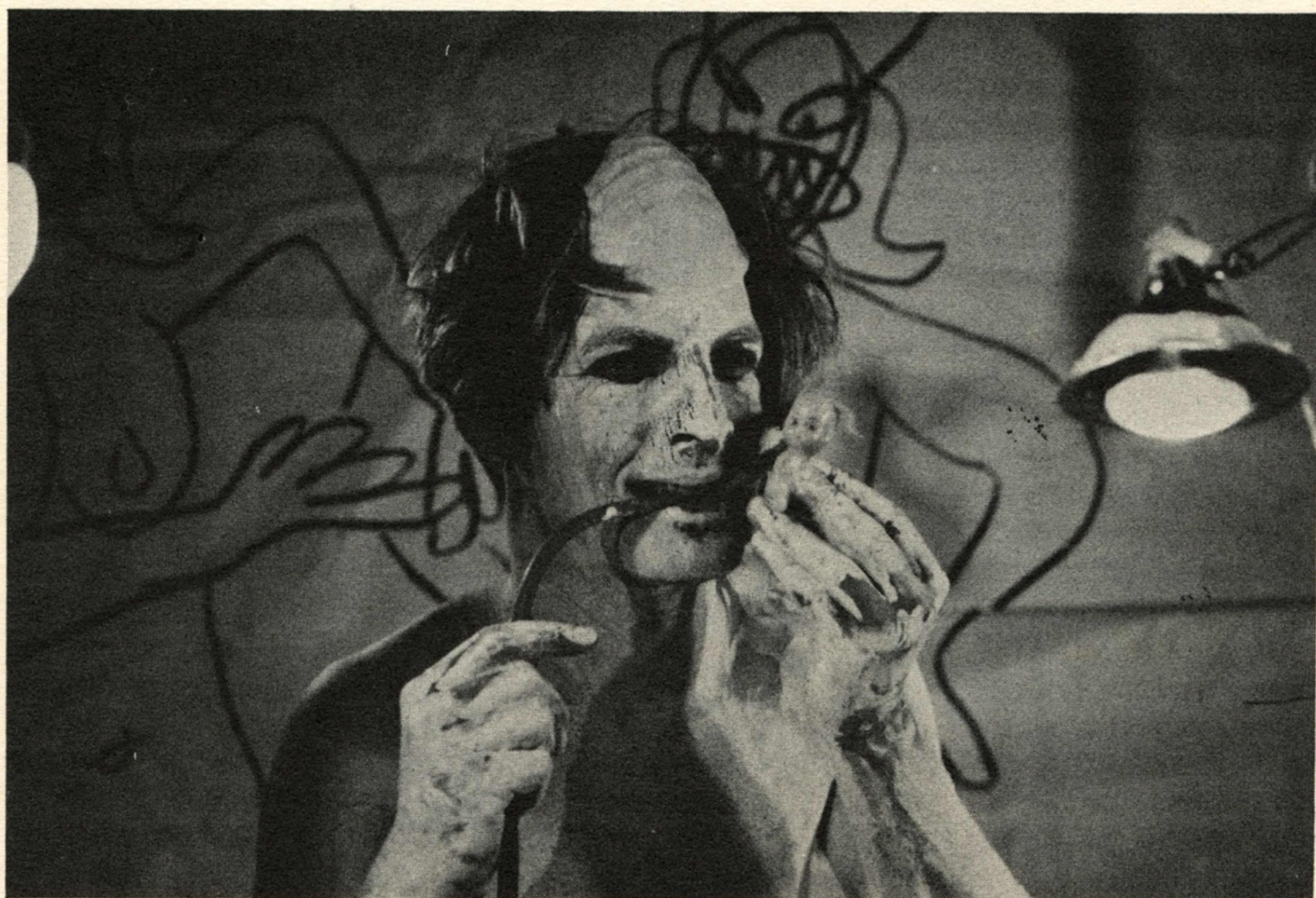


# corporealities

*"Issues facing our bodies"*



Polly Apfebaum, "Red, White & Blue", 1990 68"x53"x1 1/2"  
*Courtesy Loughelton Gallery, New York*

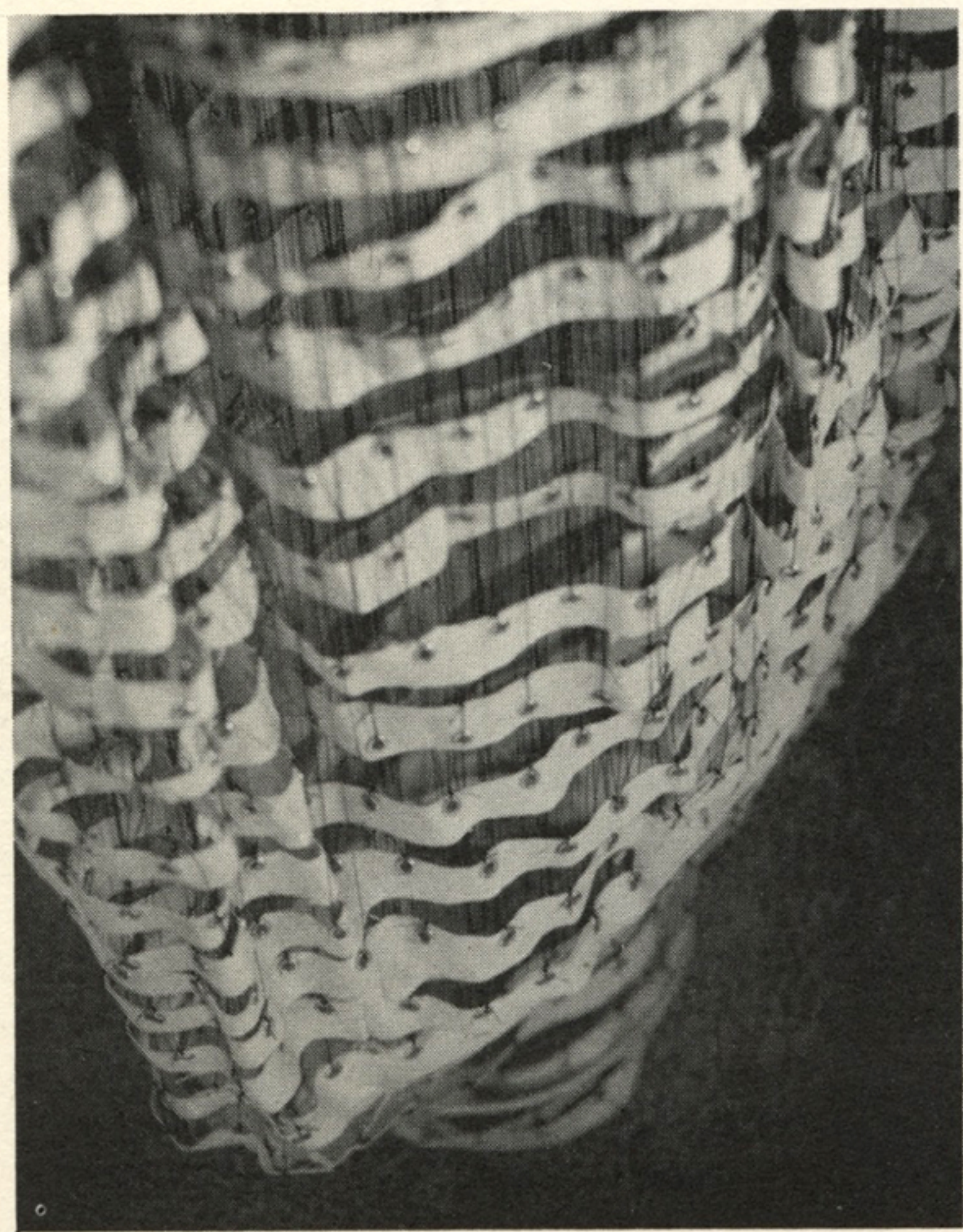


Keith Boadwee, "Birthing Piece", 1990 16"x20"

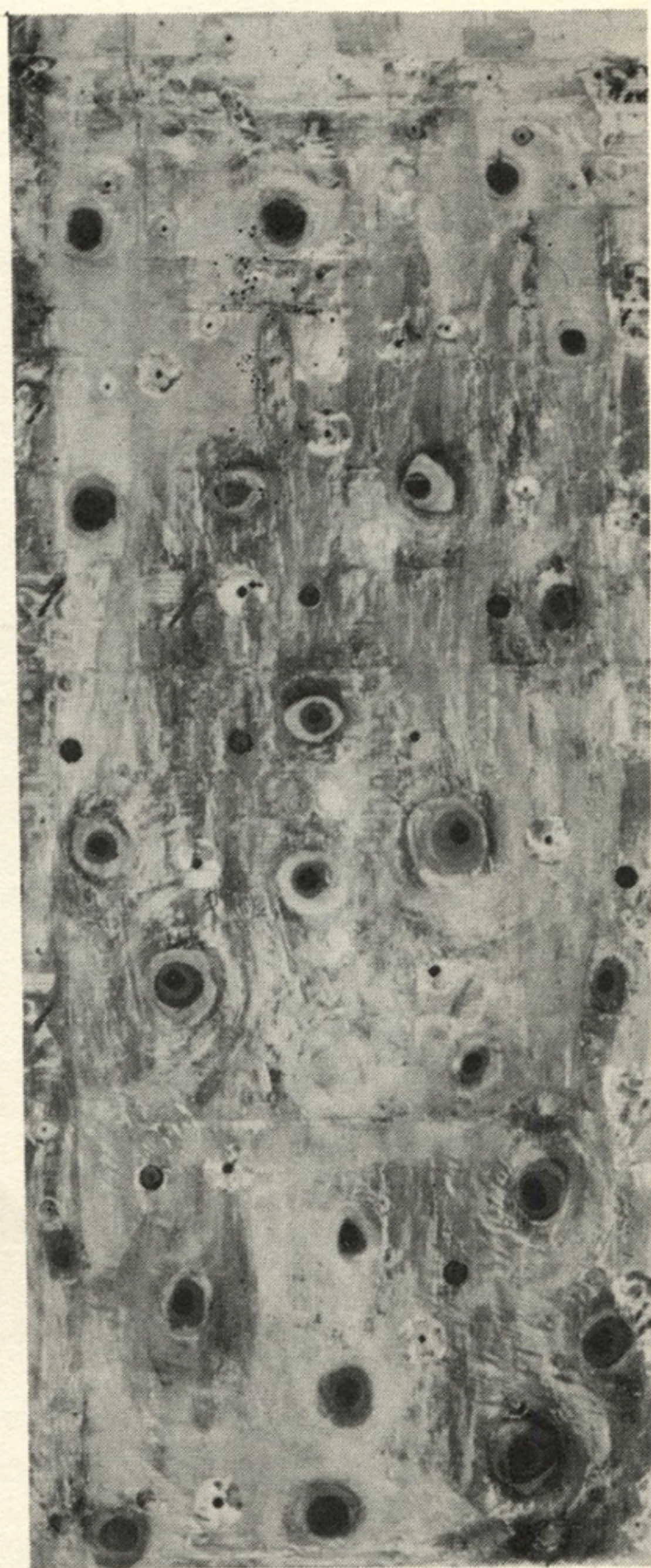




Stephen Derrickson, "Joe Has No Mouth", 1990 78"x36"



Randy Griffin  
"Untitled (Dress)", 1990 96"x24"x8"



Theresa Hackett  
"Untitled (Peacock)", 1990 48"x20"



## Corporealities

### July 28 - August 26

There are several explanations for the body's recurring topicality in art, the most prominent being the presence of AIDS. How society deals with this crisis has regressive implications beyond homophobia: the AIDS epidemic has vitalized issues concerning aging, gender, poverty, sexuality, media manipulation and the medical establishment's unreliability. Because the media appears to create and sustain public opinion, it is increasingly difficult to identify people's attitudes. Too often, the controlling elite falsely project the popularity of their programs. Fortunately, this manipulation has stimulated political involvement, forcing voters to determine their own corporealities, their personal responses to their own physiques. In most cases, democracy has surreptitiously ferreted out popular opinion: media manipulation has failed to fool the public regarding abortion, flag burning, school prayer, and even censorship.

The desire to re-evaluate our bodies follows a revived appreciation of the first body, Earth. As environmental issues have become popularized, the focus on the human body seems a natural complement. Also, the influence of psychoanalysis as a tool for interpreting art objects has made the body of crucial concern, since psychoanalytic theories explain art in terms of the body's subconscious. Landscapes are considered portraits and Bob Gober's sinks become sexual beings. In "Vexed Sex" (Art issues, January 1990), David Pagel describes the relationship between artists' decreasing sexual freedom and art objects' increasing sexuality. As artists have relinquished sexual freedom, their respective sexuality has been transferred onto their work. Not only are inanimate objects now considered anthropomorphic, but they have theoretically become receptacles for human sexuality (as well as real receptacles for theories). In light of Pagel's theory, the government's current NEA obsession is somewhat comprehensible. Given the history of authoritarian attacks on human sexuality, it follows that this group would also assume responsibility for censoring sexually-charged art. However, censoring art in order to curb sexuality makes about as much sense as Catholic vegetarians abstaining from communion wafers. Considering that the subordination of certain groups, in particular women, the aged, homosexuals, the handicapped, and the poor, is directly related to the denial of the right to their sexuality, censorship's socio-political motivations become even more apparent.

Art that raises questions, rather than proposes an ideology, should stimulate a dialogue concerning corporealities that can build consensus. While many artists do have specific political intentions, none of the artists here produce work exclusively for the purpose of politically activating the viewer. Rather, these contemplative artists prefer that viewers consider/appreciate their observations, regardless of clear solutions and ideologies. Their preference for ambiguity is rooted, not in an ambivalent malaise, but in their suspicion of authority and dogma. Also, the value of political art has been beat to a pulp. Strong works function on many levels, demonstrating the redundancy of a "political art." Moreover, the art audience is so narrow that more often than not, art that attempts to be political preaches to the converted, or confirms rather than challenges accepted beliefs. Jenny Holzer's truisms work because they contradict each other, eliminating truth and leaving everything up for grabs. On the other hand, David Wojnarowicz' photo-collages and ACT UP's demonstrations are entirely directed toward politically influencing the viewer. Wojnarowicz succeeds because he captures experiences and feelings that most viewers never have had and will never know. ACT UP achieves its goal, because its audience is so broad that they have the power to influence. Taking the discussion of ambiguity one step further, ambiguity is more alluring, making issues of the body more enticing, more sexually mystifying. Just as lingerie and veils operate on the viewer, ambiguity prevents the viewer from finding out too much, too soon.

Although cheerful and bright, Polly Apfelbaum's clown suit embodies its wearer's underlying sorrow. Disembodied, it especially captures a clown's somber, sad face, further emphasizing its contradictory identity. The clown suit's role in *making the clown* references social concerns such as subterfuge, annihilation, and disappearance. Clowns function as dichotomous beings: fun yet serious, entertaining but sad, crucial yet stepped upon. That a costume both conceals and creates its wearer's identity makes a clown's existence all the more tormented.

Keith Boadwee's "Birthing Project" is inspired by his suspicion that every man secretly desires to experience giving birth. Central to Boadwee's photo-tableaus are painting's traditional concerns -- color, composition, gesture, light and imagery. Consequently, Boadwee both selects the activity and carries out the performances, in the manner which ensures the highest order of visual stimulation. Whatever is suggested by the narrative is secondary to the photo-tableau's aesthetic qualities.

Equally concerned with composition is Stephen Derrickson, whose graphically intense pastel drawings resonate psychological trauma. In "Joe Has No Mouth", the viewer must consider issues of silence, muteness, lack of appetite, deformity, torture, and repression. Since the mouth is one of the most essential (sexual/communicative/digestive) body parts, its absence is automatically terrifying. As in most of Derrickson's work, the high level of psychological terror clouds recognizable options. Playing up ambiguity, he opts for the descriptive over the prescriptive, ensuring his art's apolitics. For Buffalo's Hallwalls, Derrickson recently curated "Insect Politics," an investigation of the human body as a socio-political site. Setting up the corporeal conflict with respect to representation in art, he termed acceptable images "official bodies" to distinguish from "counter bodies," the site where boundaries actually get stepped over. This exhibit documented the evolving struggle between authoritative/repressed "official bodies" and cavalier/unrepressed "counterbodies."



Randy Griffin's "Dress" demonstrates a full-blown analysis of a woman's dress. Entirely open-ended, this project seeks to understand what dissection and reconstruction can reveal. He fetishizes the process of analysis, since dresses generally function as make-up, an object which conceals and allures. He literally turns the dress upside-down to facilitate the search. The dress physically embodies therapy, as an analyst uncovers his patient's essential identity. He seems to relate a person's essence to his skeleton. Although his findings are primarily formal, his final outcome suggests the potential for overcoming opacity; making the object more transparent, more open to discussion.

Theresa Hackett's small paintings share their origin with Griffin's project, scrutinization. In Hackett's continual attempt to reveal and to understand the process of painting, she eventually transforms the canvas in innumerable ways. Although these paintings illustrate attempts to examine materials, she provides vivified metaphors for diseased/damaged skin, instead. These paintings are at once scratched, scarred, bitten, picked, tattooed, pierced. They become swatches of humanity. "Untitled" (Peacock) illustrates the artist's mind at work: layering, excavating, discovering, remembering. Its size mirrors her torso, demonstrating its physical resemblance and organic process.

Frustrated by history's cataloguing of ideas, Lauren Lesko's art considers how misinformation still has the capacity to pervert contemporary attitudes. His piece resembles an oversized soap dish cradling the word, "Pneuma," which can be interpreted as the *breath of life*. Dating back to Aristotle, it was believed that his spirit was a property of semen. In the Middle Ages, philosophers used this idea to verify the correlation between semen's virtue and the divine virtue, which establishes a likeness with the divine intellect. These relationships assert sperm as a pure substance; thereby, placing it above matter. Lesko's work challenges outmoded, regressive conventions which contrast white, pure and ideal, against red, bloody and defiled. The fact that history is plagued by the male perspective, not only subjugates the woman, but distorts her relationship to her body, health, needs, and desires. Just as the bull gets excited/angered by the red cape, symbolizing the body as red binds it to an anachronism, the object of male sexual aggression.

Lun-Na Menoh's elaborate costumes explore issues of bondage, in particular, the duality of pleasure and constraint. Menoh's bondage fascination resembles that presented in Pedro Almodovar's recent film, "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!". She provides the viewer/participant the opportunity to experience bondage in a pleasant fashion. Because bondage's positive aspects (wearable, portable, touchable) are rarely considered, Menoh's work implies that bondage's bad rap just leads to denial. She views the costume as skin. Donning the object evokes bondage, yet enables the viewer to get inside the object, making it an entrance to another world. Ultimately, we suffer from that which we really enjoy, especially when denial prevents us from having rewarding experiences.

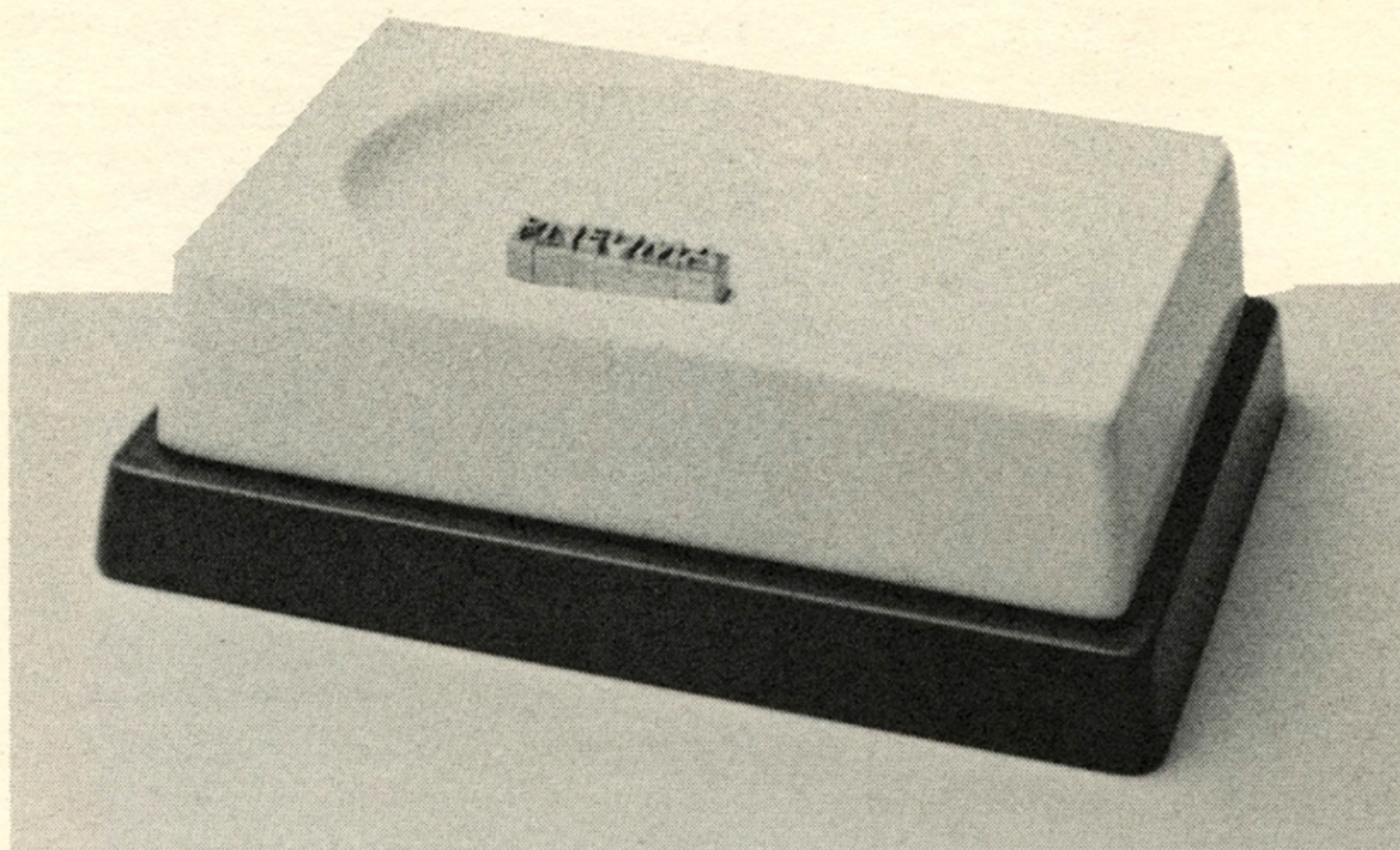
David Pagel's family of pubic-hair toothbrushes offer our bodies protection and introspection. Loosely referencing Jasper Johns' 1959 Sculptmetal toothbrush, "The Critic Smiles," Pagel's repulsive objects substitute hair for Johns' teeth, which themselves replace bristles and play upon the hairy tips of paintbrushes. Rather than emphasizing the critic's verbal power (or critical bite), Pagel's altered toothbrushes expose both the artist's susceptibility to criticism and the critic's own vulnerability before his readers. The critic may begin his work by brushing, polishing, and making presentable the seductive objects of his attentive vision, but quickly arrives at a tangle of contradictory impulses and confused sentiments that require him to reveal more intimate secrets.

Pagel's dysfunctional brushes bring together the opposite ends of one's digestive tract. By collapsing aspects of these normally opposed orifices, his sexy yet repellent fetishes ponder the randomness of our emotions -- how one's mouth or crotch excites desire, but another pair of openings, essentially no different, elicits nothing but disgust. Caught between incorporation and elimination, attraction and repulsion, the body conjured by Pagel's brushes is a contradictory organism whose intense reactions might not make sense, but are no less compelling for their arbitrariness. In seeming contrast to the physical nature of our heads and tails, we brush our teeth and wipe our pubic hair, suggesting that propriety invites transgression, and that the risk of incomprehension ultimately engenders pleasure.

Carter Potter's FAG branding iron not only challenges societal taboos, but questions the extent to which people are allowed to act out prejudices. While physically branding a human is one of the most awful tortures imaginable, he refuses to differentiate between a charred marking and a social stigma. Equating a damaged psyche to a maimed limb reinforces stereotyping's repugnance. The affinities a hot branding iron shares with the original faggot are quite interesting. Like a branding iron, a faggot is a bundle of pieces of iron or steel to be welded or hammered into bars. However, the contemporary usage of fag as cigarette suggests a perverse analogy with homosexuals. Substituting a branding iron for a paintbrush, Potter creates a scenario which forces the viewer to participate, both in his life and in society's condition.

David Schafer's constructivist-inspired "FFREUD" exudes sexuality, despite its clean, svelte forms. The pink disk has multiple allusions -- a throbbing penis, a pulsating heart, or an aroused pelvic region. It is remarkable that such an inanimate material as steel can obtain such results, demonstrating this sculpture's metaphorical beauty. This homage to Freud (and sexuality) sums up how psychoanalysis still informs art, as proposed from the onset. Even an object comprised of a disc and an I-beam is so sexually charged that it conjures up a host of imaginary beings.





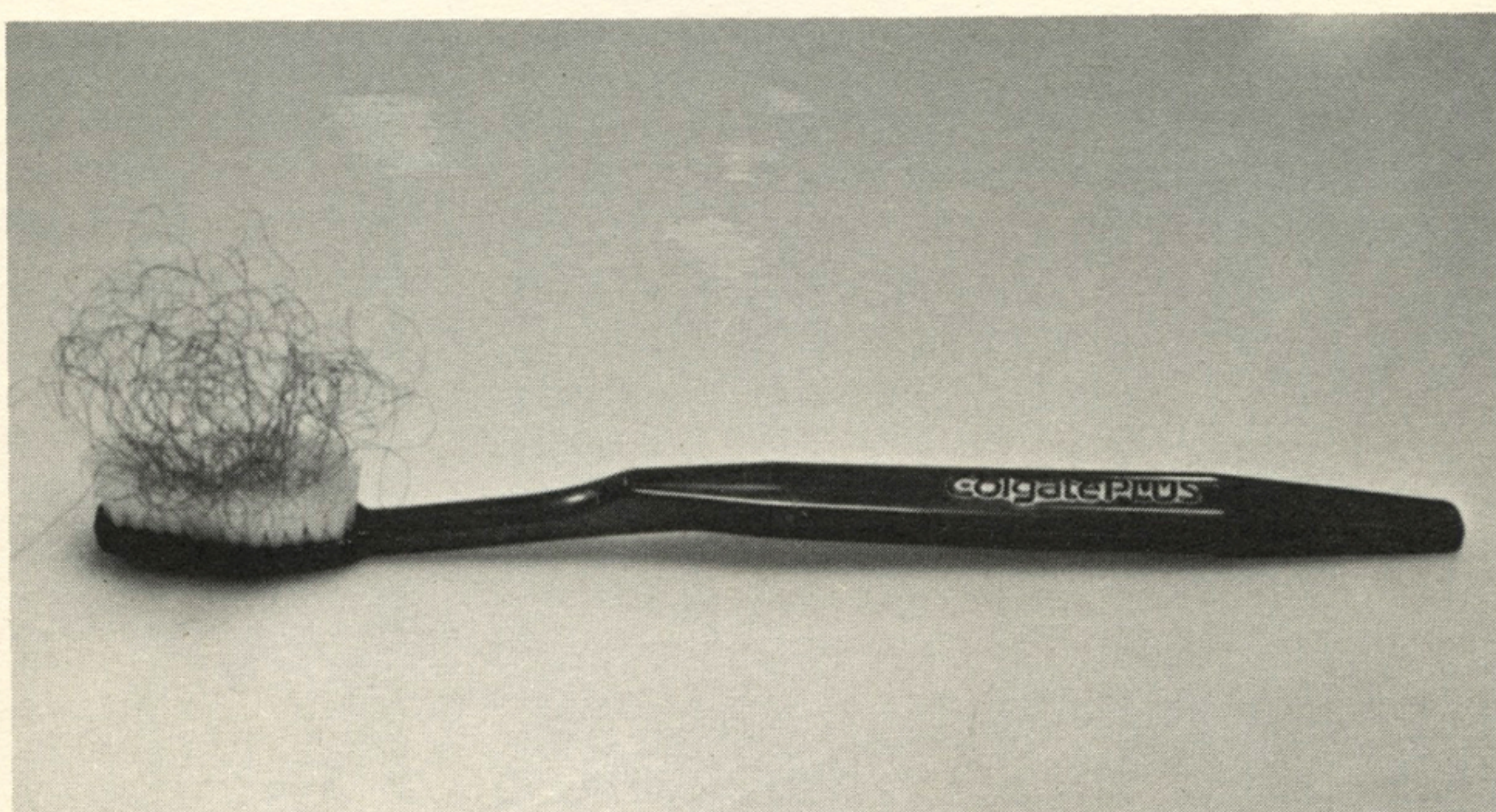
Lauren Lesko "Pneuma", 1990 3 1/2"x9 1/2"x7"



Lun-Na Menoh

"A Crack of a Night Sky/Watching a Star in a Garden", 1988 41"x15"x8"

*Photo: Ingo Harney*



David Pagel, "The Devil Will Find Work For Idle Hands to Do", 1990

2"x7 1/2"x2"