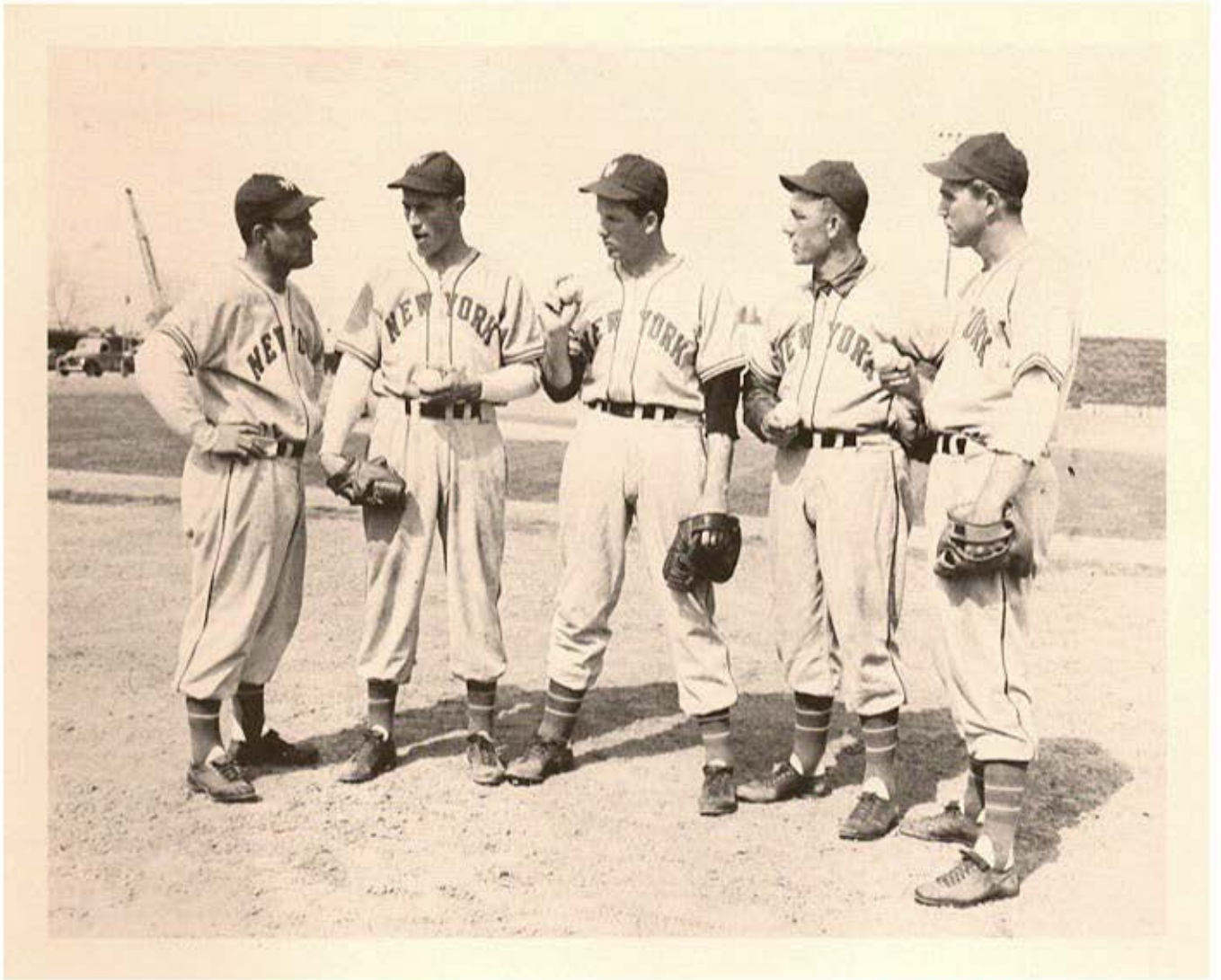


On Art and Perfume or Did Mondrian Use Masking Tape?



1969.

On Art and Perfume or Did Mondrian Use Masking Tape?  
Paintings, Assemblages, Objects and Prints by Richard Merkin  
November 7 to December 2, 1969  
Hayden Gallery Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Sponsored by the MIT Committee on the Visual Arts

## A Few Acknowledgments

Many thanks to all of those people who so kindly lent works to this exhibition.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people for their aid and encouragement and most of all for their kindness. My gratitude then to:

My friend Mr. Ken Kneitel, the Wizard of Fandango, for the companionship that has enriched so many of my nonworking hours. He is a rare cat endowed with rare gifts not the least of which, among these, is the ability to transform a cheeseburger and coffee at Stark's into a banquet. For his company is never less than a joy and if I have neglected to tell him this before then let this serve notice. . . .

And to Mr. Kenn Speiser, co-proprietor with Mr. Frank Reardon in Bizzaro, who is the finest printer and the most generous friend a boy could ask for. He is also a consummate artist and his taste in vintage postal cards and wives and two-dimensional organizations in general, is impeccable. . . .

Finally, I would like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the Ladies Who Run the Obelisk Gallery, my friends Phyllis Rosen and Joan Stoneman, who are to me what the knuckleball must be to Hoyt Wilhelm. As we approach the end of our first five-year plan any gesture of thanks for their faith, their enthusiasm and their encouragement seems blatantly inadequate. Nevertheless, thank you. . . .

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Richard Merkin  
New York, 1969

'Art strives for form and hopes for beauty.'

George Bellows

'Motherwell paints like a guy who knows what to tip the headwaiter.'

Anonymous colleague

'It is the process of painting which is repellent; to force from little tubes of lead a glutinous flamboyance and to defile with the hair of a camel therein steeped, taut canvas is hardly the diversion of a gentleman.'

Max Beerbohm

'By the way, those one-color boys have sure got me down. They contemplate their optical illusions as if they were Pure Being but all I can see is a . . . corporate symbol. Occasionally I talk shop with them but more often than not I demand an explanation.'

Justin Green

### Notes towards an Explanation

Basically, the pictures that I have done in the recent past can be divided into two main groups: those dominated by a single motivating factor, often of a more or less "documentary" nature and those that are compendia of varied associations from diffuse sources. A third category might seem to be suggested by the more eccentric pictures and perhaps a number of the assemblages and objects but more often than not I find that these have much in common with the latter form. The pictures then are executed in cycles and although they cannot in any sense be termed polarities, they do constitute a kind of balance in my program.

With rare exception I work on a single picture until it is complete. In the past few years I have found the pictures taking longer to do than they did four or five years ago. I am also aware of the fact that the more recent work has a sense of formality that is insinuated rather acutely. I find this somewhat curious because if anything my attitude towards the proprieties inherent in the act of painting (as see them) has become more flexible. The seeming paradox however gives rise to positive results: the expansion of the total pictorial potential tempered by an execution that has become firmer and more exacting creates incidents that did not appear in the older pictures.

I believe in an art that is pertinent and one that is in a sense "employed" to use the phrase of a colleague. I naturally believe in a full art, a rich art and one that touches on as many levels as possible. There is no doubt that "art is a private matter", as Tzara has said, but in so far as I am concerned this does not present an unsurmountable obstacle to the production of a picture that strives to be relevant. I have no interest in the multitudes of meager triumphs that abound. Like Rex Reed or those ghastly Norwegian wooden shoes that so many otherwise attractive young ladies insist upon dragging around, they are simply segments of my environment.

I have never made pictures that are to be solved like riddles nor deciphered like puzzles. I do not make pictures that are about anything except themselves. My selection of elements would, if traced, tell something about me but in the end, the effectiveness of any picture is dependent upon its organization and the associations that it can give rise to — what the picture is and what it stands for. I have no interest in nostalgia nor in a readily translatable language of symbols. I believe in the utilization of anything proper to make poetry. I use, both directly and obliquely, books, magazines, photographs, newspapers and printed ephemera of every nature. I find myself involved with the concept of history, research and

journalism as material for the making of pictures. I select and work from and arrange to make a new totality that is itself. R. B. Kitaj's remark about using books as a landscape painter would use trees is lyrical and it is accurate.

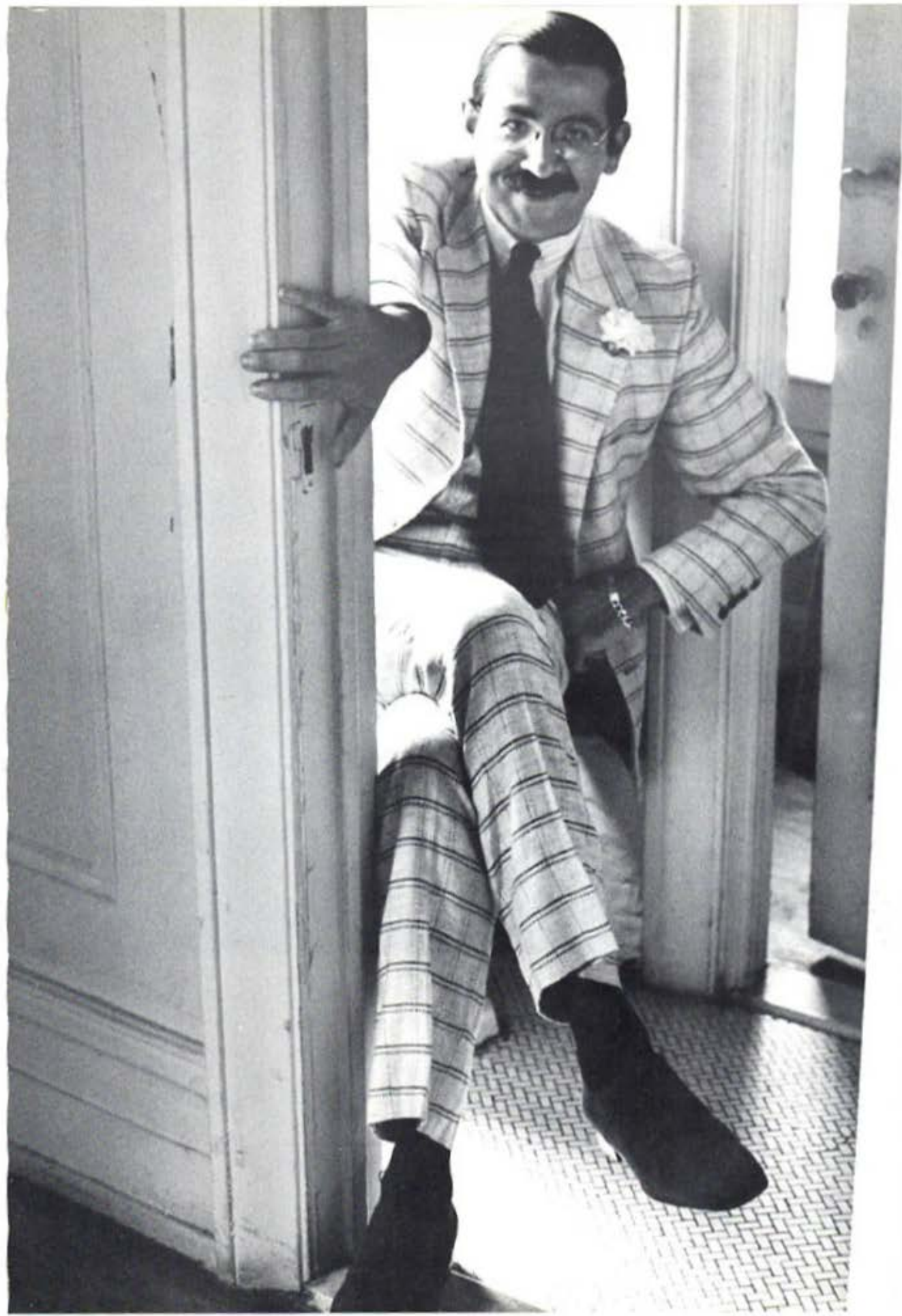
I cannot see anything wrong with knowing what to tip the headwaiter. I believe implicitly in proprieties and in the knowledge of those things one should not do, and I look upon restraint as as valuable an instrument as impulse and spontaneity. While the statement by Max Beerbohm on painting as an unsuitable activity for gentlemen may be somewhat extreme, it does serve to lay a good foundation for reticence as equipment. More to the point though is Sir Max's comment upon the attire of Beau Brummell, "free from folly or affectation, yet susceptible to exquisite ordering; plastic, austere, economical"—and, as James Laver correctly adds, beautiful. It is somewhat remarkable to compare this description of the epitome of 19th century male costume with a synopsis of art by the Columbus, Ohio strongboy who painted a Stag at Sharkey's—"Art strives for form and hopes for beauty."

In conclusion, I have used whatever I felt proper and necessary to make the best and the most beautiful pictures that I possibly could and that, as the actress said to the bishop, would seem to be all for the moment.



"... because the Wizard had given him an excellent heart of red plush."  
L. Frank Baum, The Scarecrow and The Tin Woodman of Oz.

Richard Merkin was born in 1938 in Brooklyn, N.Y. From 1943 to 1956 he attended New York City public schools and later studied at Syracuse University and the Rhode Island School of Design. He presently teaches painting and drawing at the Rhode Island School of Design and lives in New York City with a black and white cat named Fred.



## Paintings

Note: with the exception of entries 1-8 the following paintings were done in the period of one year, from the fall of 1968 to the fall of 1969.



1  
The Sheik with the Whistling Cigar  
Mixed Media, 1965, 40 x 60  
Lent by Mr. Frederick Willey, Jr.,  
Cambridge

An oblique melodrama with Bruno  
Hauptmann and the Johnson Smith  
catalogue as its primary sources.



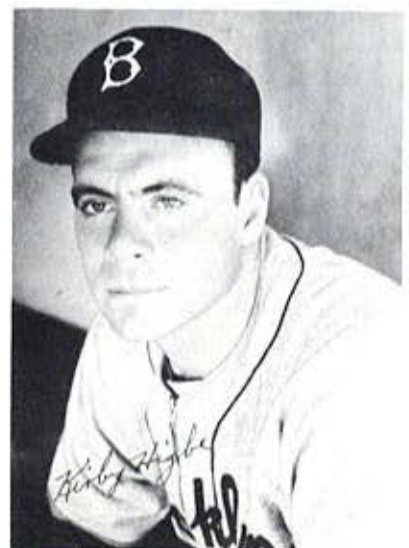
The Cropsey Maniac at Luna Park  
(1936)

Mixed Media, 1966, 48 x 66

Lent by Mr. Louis Sofro, Providence  
The central figure was taken from the  
sheet music of *Am I Blue* (from the  
film *On with the Show*) and is most  
likely Ethel Waters.



Kirby Higbe (22-9), Whit Wyatt (22-10) and the Pitching Staff of the National League Champion Brooklyn Dodgers, 1941 Minus Tamulis  
Mixed Media, 1967, 60 x 80  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Avram Goldberg, Brookline



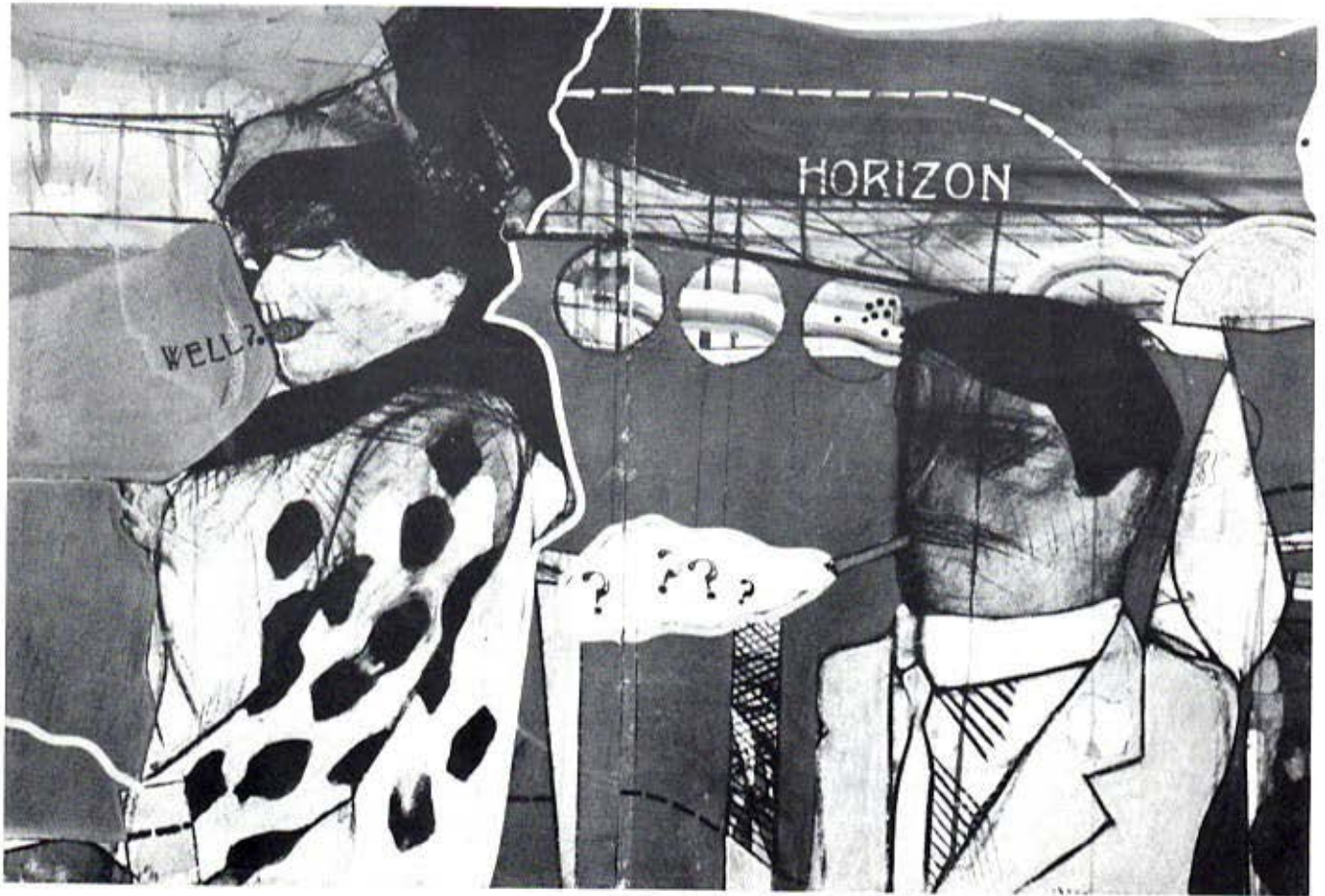
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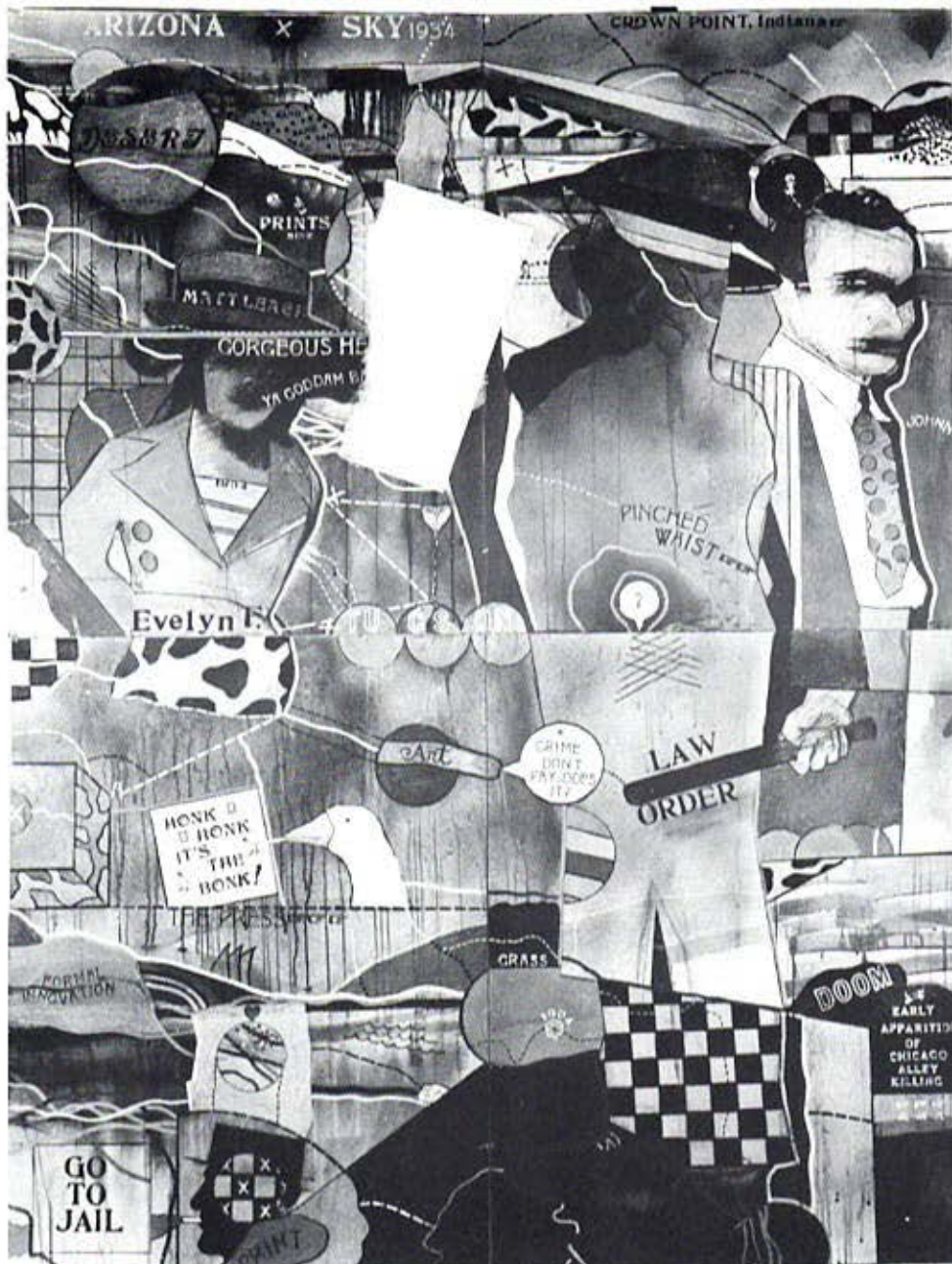
The Betrothed

Mixed Media, 1964-7, 26 x 38

Lent by Mr. Charles Meyer, Wash-  
ington

After the Kipling poem.



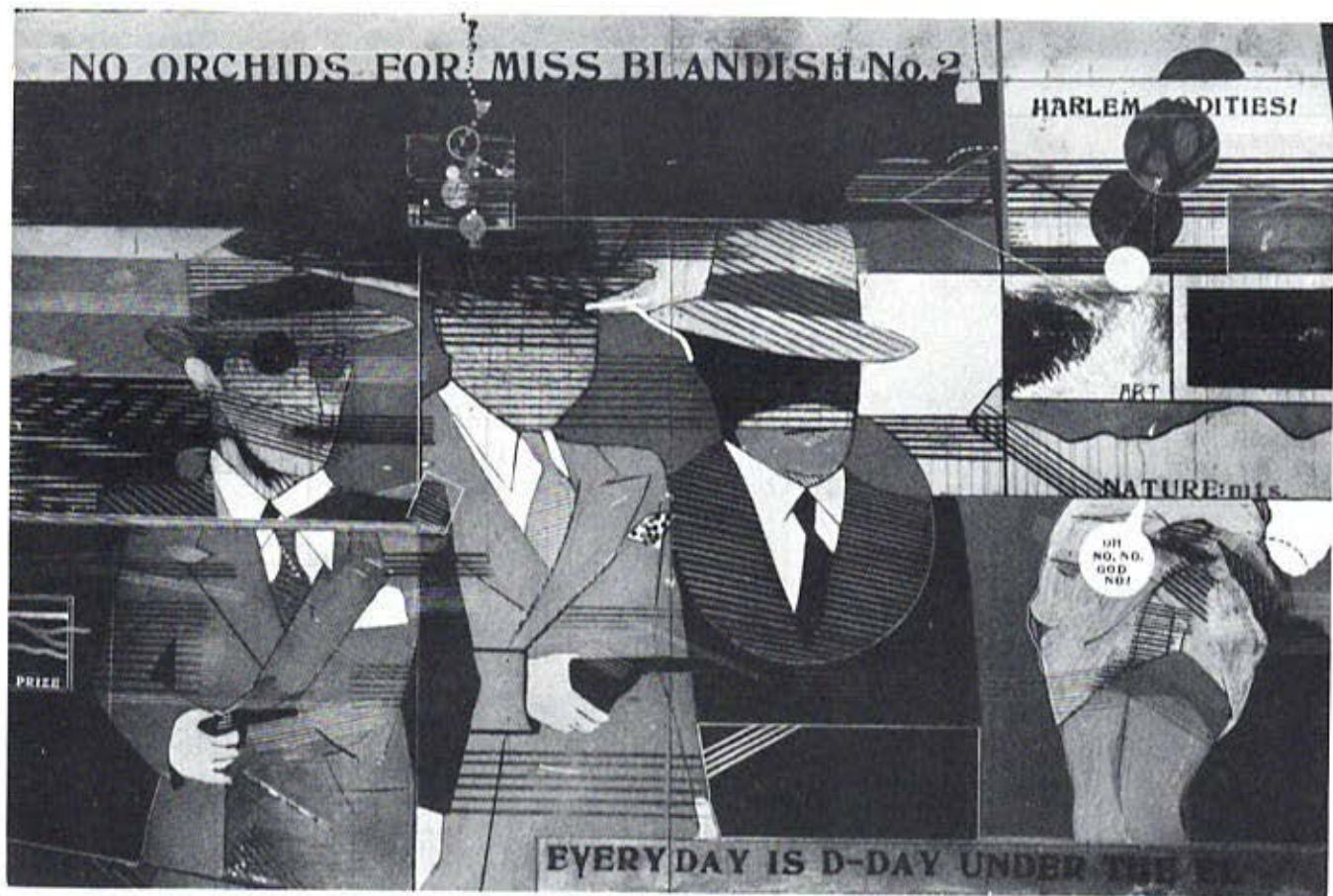


5  
 The Second Capture of John Dillinger, Tucson, Arizona, January 25th, 1934  
 Mixed Media, 1967, 60 x 80  
 Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sonnabend, Brookline

No Orchids for Miss Blandish # 2  
Mixed Media, 1967, 40 x 60  
Lent by the Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York

'Tonight, just as the daylight's last  
sleepy Boy Scout is being tucked in  
with a kiss and a prayer, the sullen  
evening's earliest torpedo slips the  
long cue silently from the shadowy  
rack. Touches the shaded lamp  
above the green-baized cloth and  
turns on the night. Every day is D-day  
under the El.'

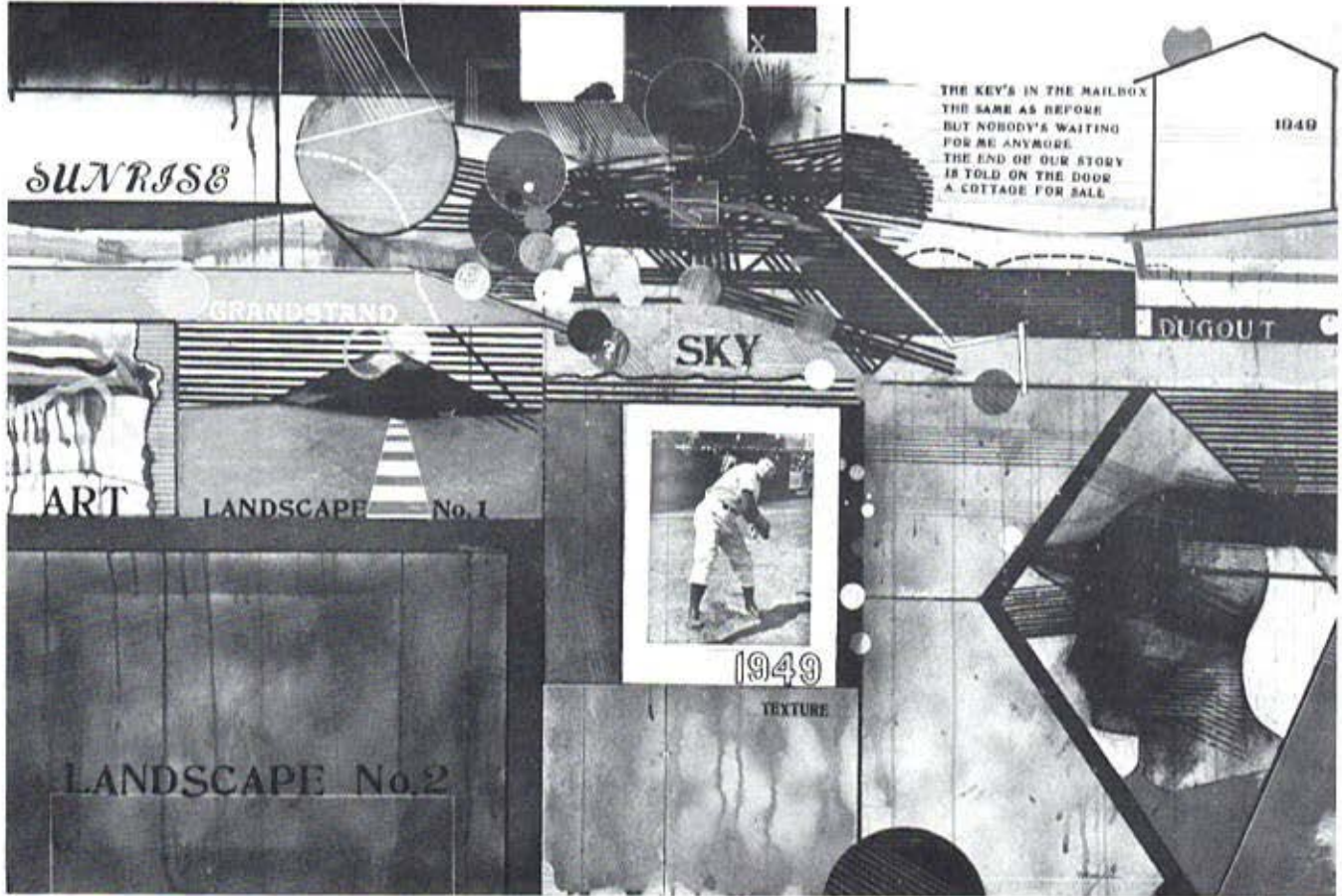
Nelson Algren, Chicago: City on  
the Make



7

A Set of Notes in Search of Cuddles  
Marshall  
Mixed Media, 1968, 40 x 60  
Lent by the Rose Art Museum,  
Brandeis University, Waltham

A set of notes in search of an atmosphere that pervaded my college years in the late 1950's. Within this context I was largely inspired by the singing of Chris Conner. Clarence Marshall pitched in 21 ball games for the New York Yankees in 1949. He won three and lost none.



Scrapbook: Fitzgerald in Hollywood  
Mixed Media, 1968, 30 x 40  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Hinlein,  
Philadelphia

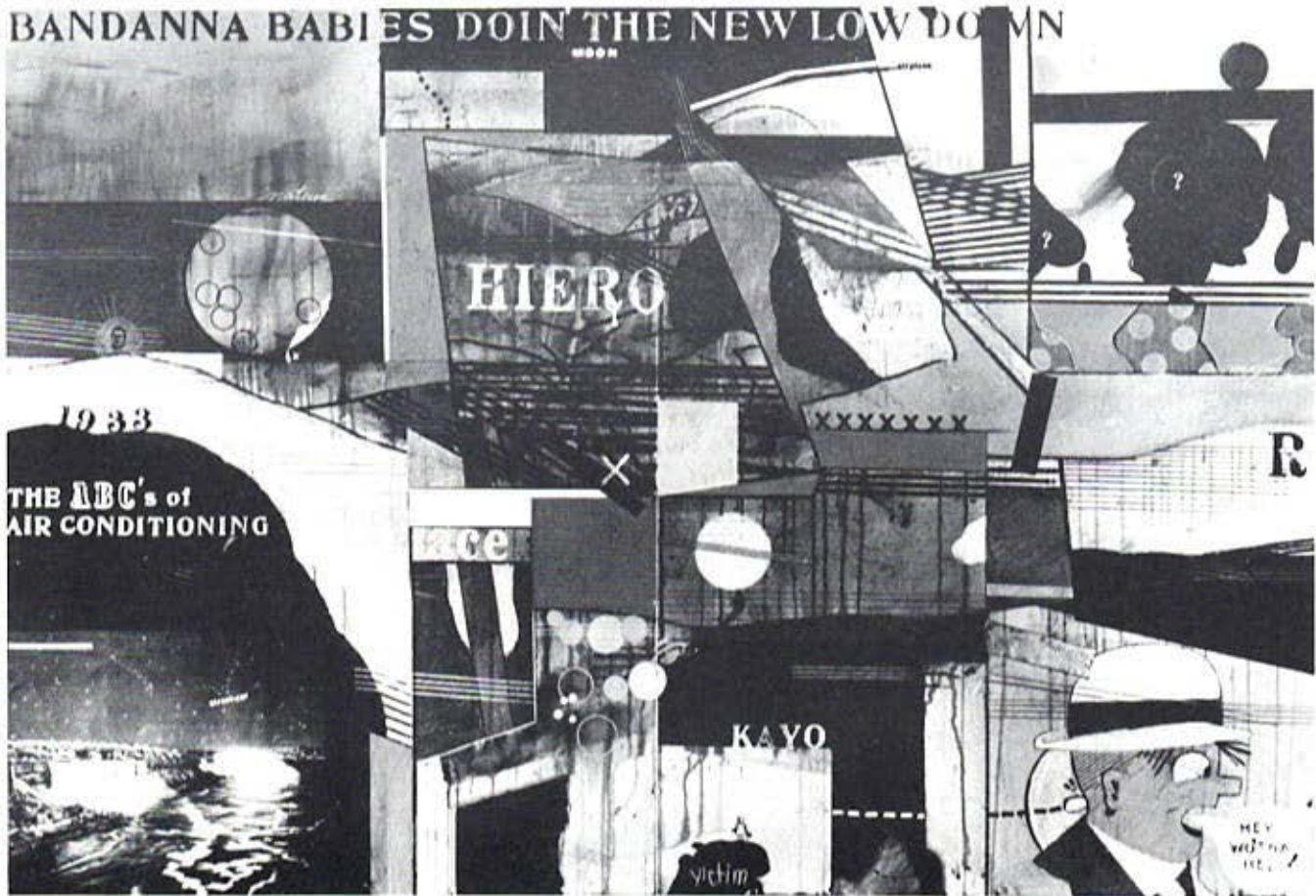
'You know, I used to have a beautiful talent once, Baby. It used to be a wonderful feeling to know it was there, and it isn't all gone yet. I think I have enough left to stretch out over two more novels. I may have to stretch it a little thin, so maybe they won't be as good as the best things I've done. But they won't be completely bad either, because nothing I ever write can ever be completely bad.'

F. Scott Fitzgerald, as quoted by Budd Schulberg in Fitzgerald in Hollywood

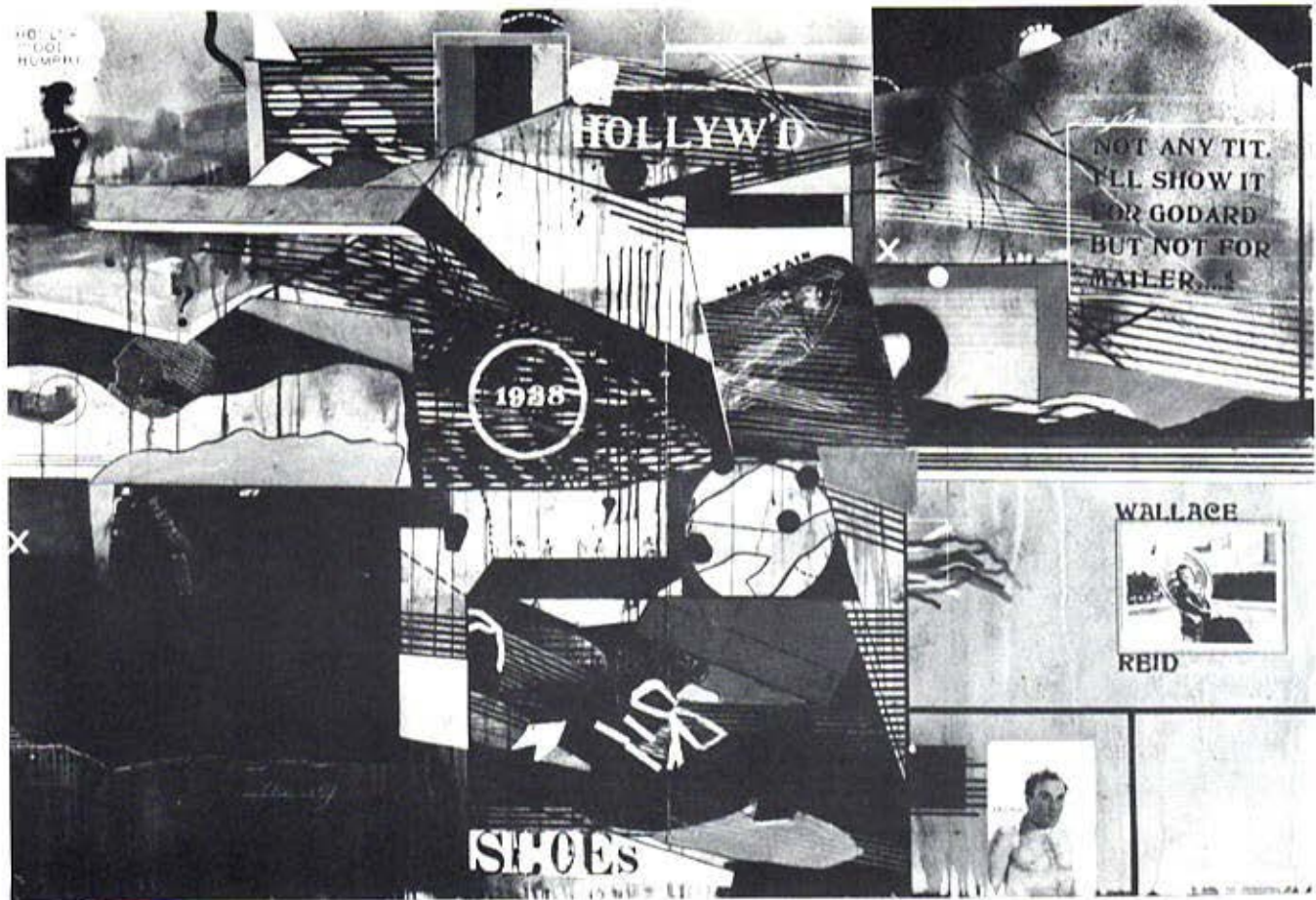


10\*

The ABC's of Air Conditioning  
Mixed Media, 1969, 40 x 60  
Bandanna Babies Doin' the New  
Low Down is by Dorothy Fields and  
Jimmy McHugh and is from Black-  
birds of 1928. The tune is utilized  
in this instance as a basic theme.







11

A Set of Observations on a Cinematic Theme: Early, Middle and Late

Mixed Media, 1969, 40 x 60

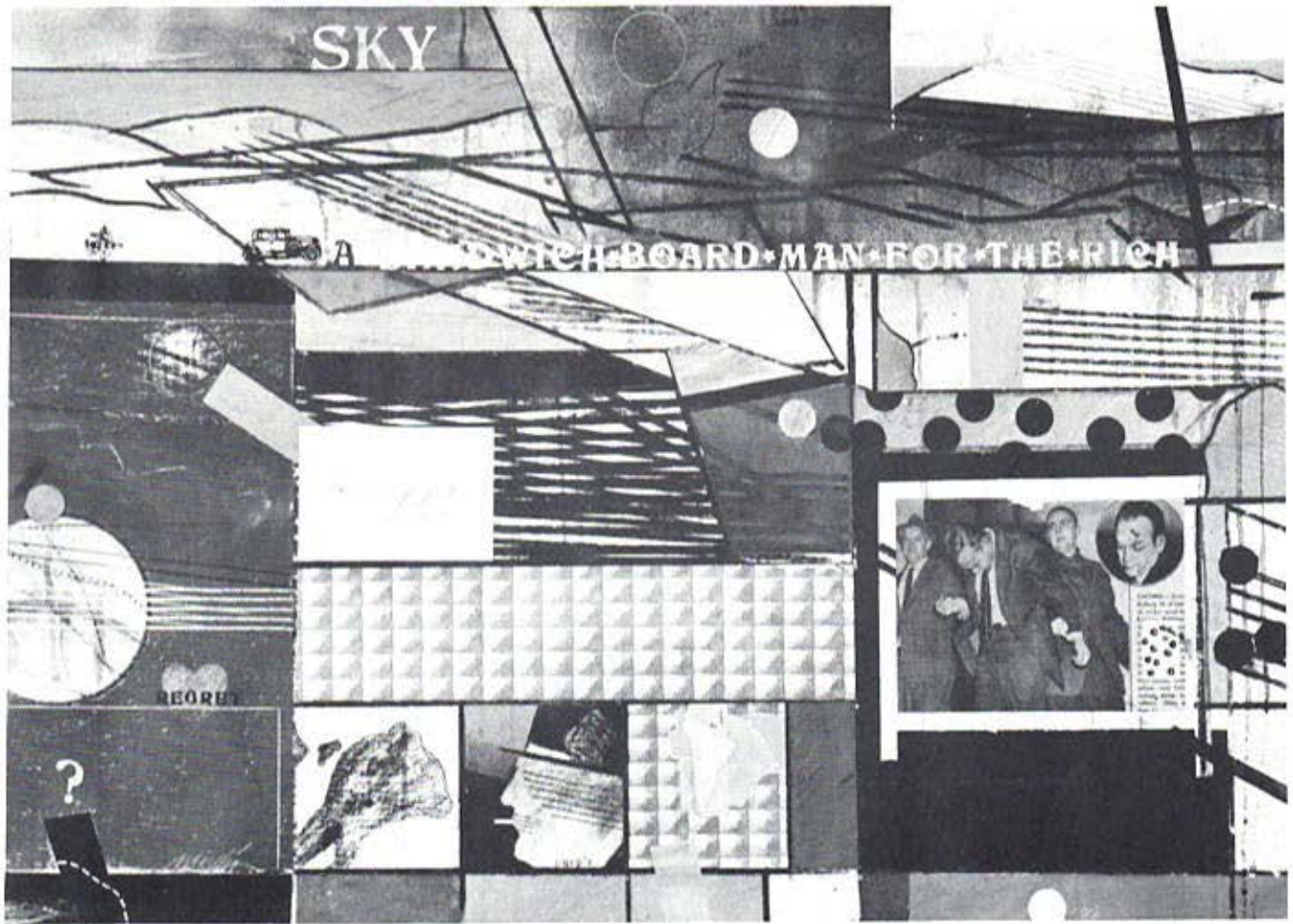
'Not any tit. I'll show it for Godard but not for Mailer.'

Miss Joy Bang

The photograph at the lower right is of Mrs. Wallace Reid and was taken after the death of her husband.



Miss Joy Bang



12\*  
The Newspaper Racket  
Mixed Media, 1969, 30 x 40

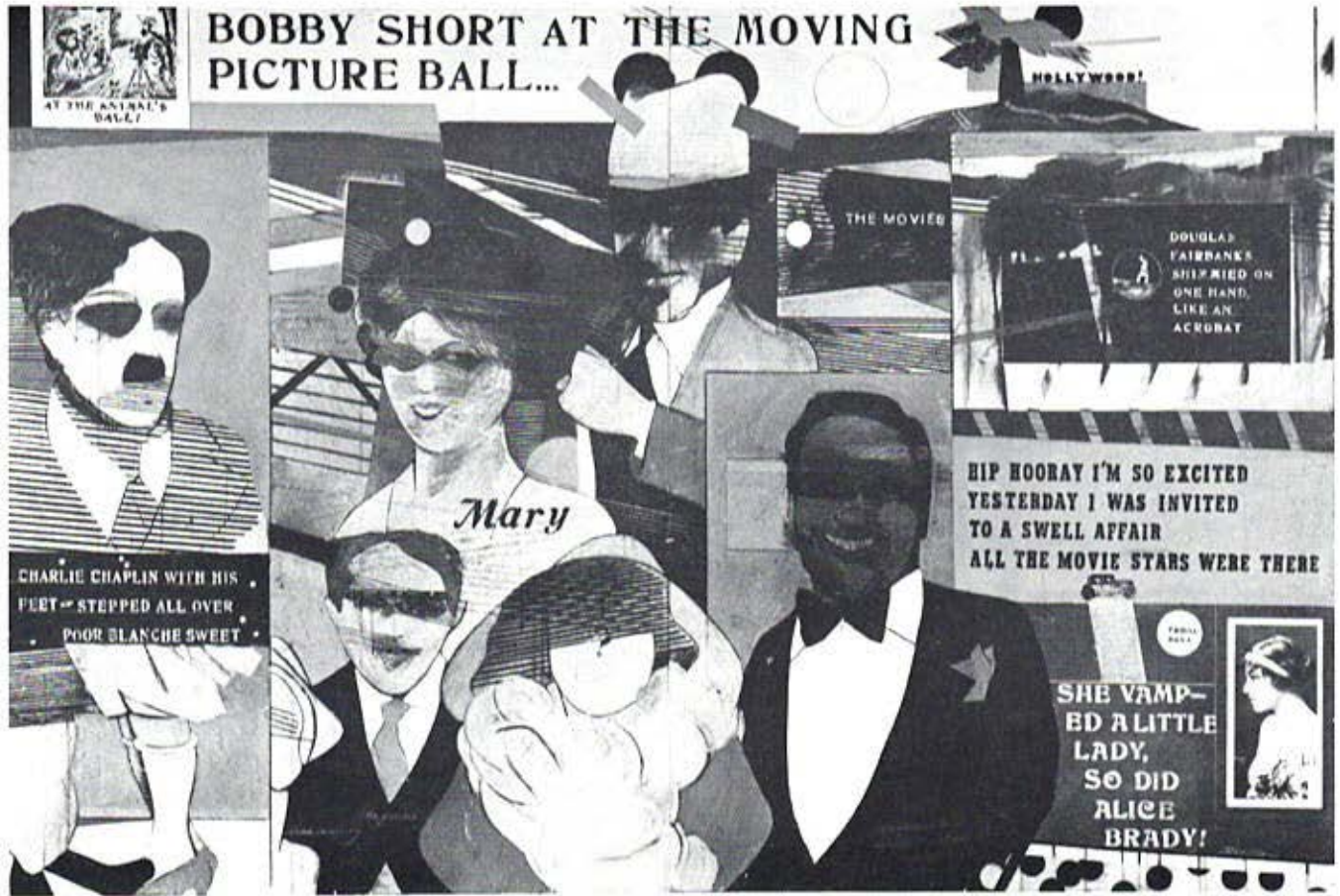


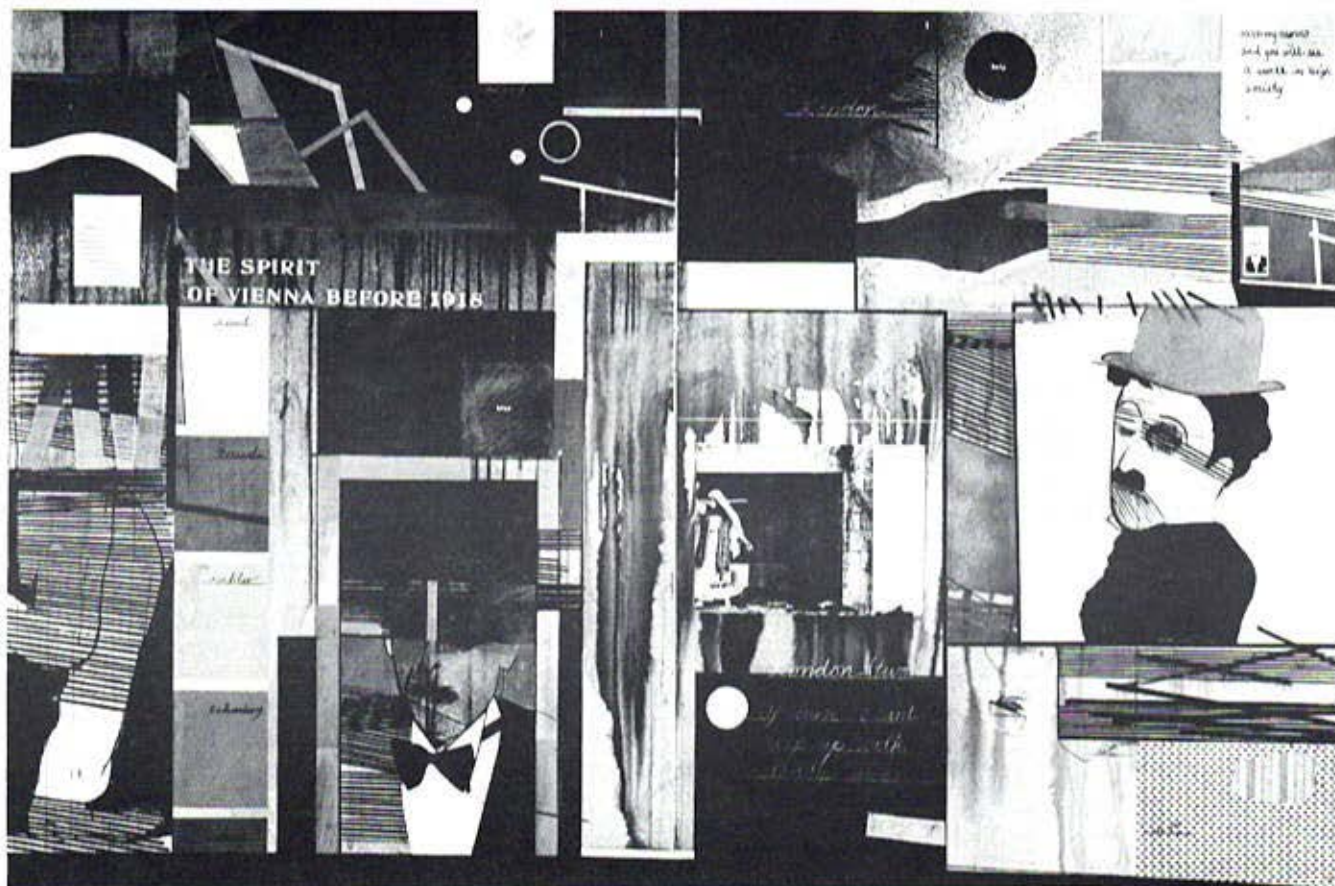
A Sandwich-Board Man for the Rich

02  
Klassikal Kubism  
Mixed Media, 1969, 20 x 26



Mr. Bobby Short at the Moving Picture Ball  
Mixed Media, 1969, 40 x 60  
Lent by Mr. Bobby Short, New York  
At the Moving Picture Ball was written by Howard Johnson and Joseph Santly. At the Animal's Ball is an early New Orleans tune.





Ralph Barton, the Cabaretier, who established the President for the Hispanic Middle East.

28  
 Crosscurrents  
 Mixed Media, 1969, two panels,  
 96 x 72  
 Upper panel: Ralph Barton and  
 Charlie Chaplin in London, 1931  
 (above)

Lower panel: Gladys Bentley's  
 Closet (next page)  
 (for R. B. Kitaj)

It is rumored that Gladys Bentley's  
 closet contained only T-shirts,  
 jeans and white tuxedos.  
 The lyrics in the lower panel are  
 from Ma Rainey's Prove It on Me  
 Blues.

Brochure: A Romance (for Miss  
Connie Bates)  
including  
The Connie Trip  
The Violation of Categorical Ex-  
pectancies  
and Lillian Harvey in Hollywood  
Mixed Media, 1969, 48 x 72

The lyrics to I Can't Get Started  
with You by Vernon Duke and Ira  
Gershwin are one of several alter-  
nate sets to the better known lyrics  
sung by Bunny Berigan among many  
others. The 'violation of categorical  
expectancies' is a term of Kenneth  
Burke's utilized by John Chamberlain  
in a critique of Fitzgerald's Tender  
Is the Night.



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