



The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago

Acknowledgments

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We are especially appreciative of the interest and participation of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen.

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Susanne Ghez
Director

October 2 - November 19, 1983

Anne Rorimer on John Knight

The collection of a man's trade-mark designs may well be the measure of his proficiency as an artist.

—Harry L. Gage¹

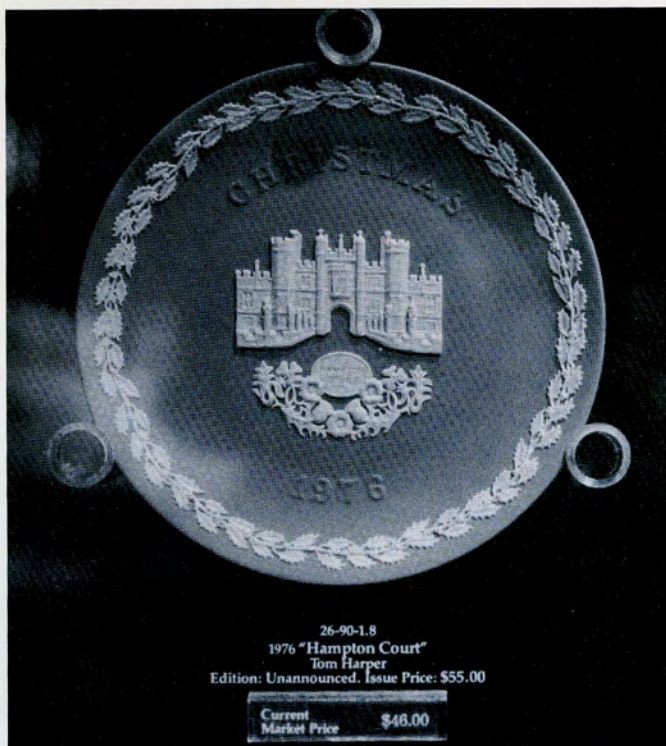
The art of John Knight successfully eludes stereotypical categorization. Each work assumes a different form, although each has been the result of consistent ideas and goals throughout the artist's fifteen-year career.

Museotypes, a work conceived for exhibition at the Renaissance Society, suggests the nature of Knight's working method. The investigation of this particular piece points to its specific implications while a consideration of related earlier pieces further demonstrates the character and development of his work in general.

Sixty bone-china dinner plates comprise the Renaissance Society work. Presented like a series of limited edition commemorative plates, the standard china, gold-trim 10½ inch eggshell-colored plates serve as the background for regal purple-blue images of architectural ground plans drawn to scale. Each ground plan, silk-screened and overglazed in the center of the plate, represents a different museum. As here adopted by Knight, the ground plan, often found on printed museum brochure guides, acts as a visual shorthand, linking institutions of a kind. The plans of each museum convey individual, formal eccentricities, but as a group they present a generalized appearance.

The depiction of the museum through the form of its architectural ground plan influences the level on which the work is perceived. Knight has not represented the particular museums by their most familiar images — a literal rendition of the facade of each one, for example — as might appear on actual commemorative plates. Instead, the abstract configuration of the ground plan serves as a ready-made code or symbol whose concentrated form also identifies it with the contemporary emblematic trademark design, or corporate logotype, which over the last several decades has become an aggressive marketing strategy aimed at instant product visibility and a commonplace of industry. Filling the need for “a graphic device that must positively project an ‘all-encompassing’ visual image,”² the logotype has emerged as an all-pervasive means of identification.

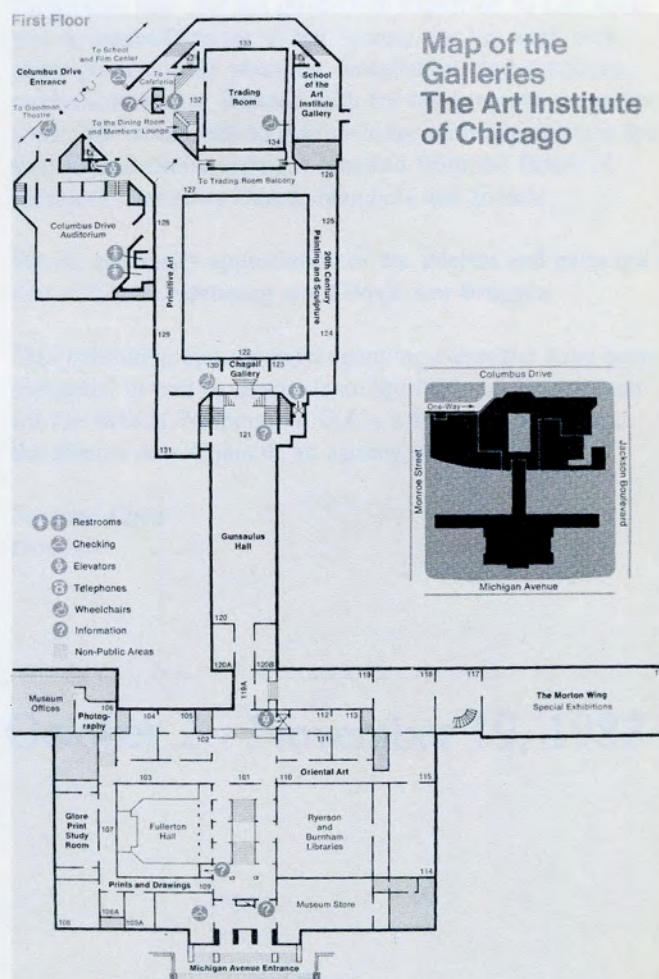
In *Museotypes* Knight fuses various visual, but specifically non-art traditions in order to question and revalidate contemporary art practise. Contributing first and foremost to the meaning of this piece is the significant role played by the commemorative plate as a collectable item in popular culture. Paradoxically, the commemorative plate elevates and reduces all manner of subject to its commercially desirable, mass-produced form. As souvenir and symbol it offers personal identification with idealized or idolized contemporary or historical figures, places or events in the form of a tangible and decorative object. Such plates incorporate a wide range of visual material from family crests to baseball stars to famous historical sites. They may commemorate a well-known, highly



Commemorative plate, The Bradford Museum, Niles, Illinois

valued Renaissance work of art by Bellini, Botticelli, or Raphael as easily as a painting by Norman Rockwell acclaimed by the populace at large. Others are simply an original design for a specific theme of popular appeal. Limited edition plates are purchased also for investment reasons. Their market is as active and speculative as for any commodity value object and possesses its own Exchange Mart for buying and selling.

Knight's plates insert themselves into the domain of "high" art, fully acknowledging the "non-art" status of commemorative plates. The subject matter depicted on his plates is, ironically, the museum, that bastion of culture where aesthetic value is not an issue, but a given. The unexpected union of museum, commemorative plate, corporate imagery and investment collecting raises a number of questions and brings certain issues to the fore. In their capacity as commemorative objects, these plates display the ultimate place of display – the museum – enshrining the shrine of culture, memorializing that which memorializes. Objects of commodity value, Knight's plates symbolize the museum, an institution which may indirectly affect the value of objects through the acquisition, exhibition and preservation of art works. Collectable items by nature, the plates ironically depict that institution in which collecting provides historical credibility. The association of museum and corporate trademark, moreover, allies the museum with the larger commercial and social structure. As the artist maintains, the work thereby becomes "a representation of the museum and its role in the culture."³ By the way it crosses barriers between so-called high and low art, the piece asks for recognition of the museum's role in determining what is sanctified and for consideration of what, in the end, determines aesthetic value.



Ground plan, The Art Institute of Chicago

Although visually disparate from one another, Knight's works connect thematically in multiple ways. Four major works of the last several years relate directly to *Museotypes* with respect to their concerns and content. These works include the *Journal Series*, begun in 1978 and continuing to the present; a piece proposed in 1981 for exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; an installation exhibited at *Documenta 7*, Kassel, West Germany, in 1982; and a work executed in Paris at the beginning of this year.

The *Journal Series* differs greatly in format from *Museotypes* yet shares much in common with it as well. It is a work which exists outside of any specified exhibition situation, although it was shown in a museum context at the time of The Art Institute of Chicago's *74th American Exhibition* in the summer of 1982.⁴ From the initial conception of this work to the present Knight has mailed to a number of individuals some eighty-five magazine gift subscriptions for periods of six months to a year. The types of high-gloss journals sent by Knight are those found on newsstands everywhere – not the scholarly, technical, or specialized periodical – a fact which is central to this work. Whatever the individual focus – cooking, fashion, interior design, nature, or art – the magazines represent the dominant set of values promulgated by the mass media and supported by the vast majority. Whether by direct advertisement, or indirectly through “up front” suggestion on its cover, the magazine presents a contemporary “view” of the good life.

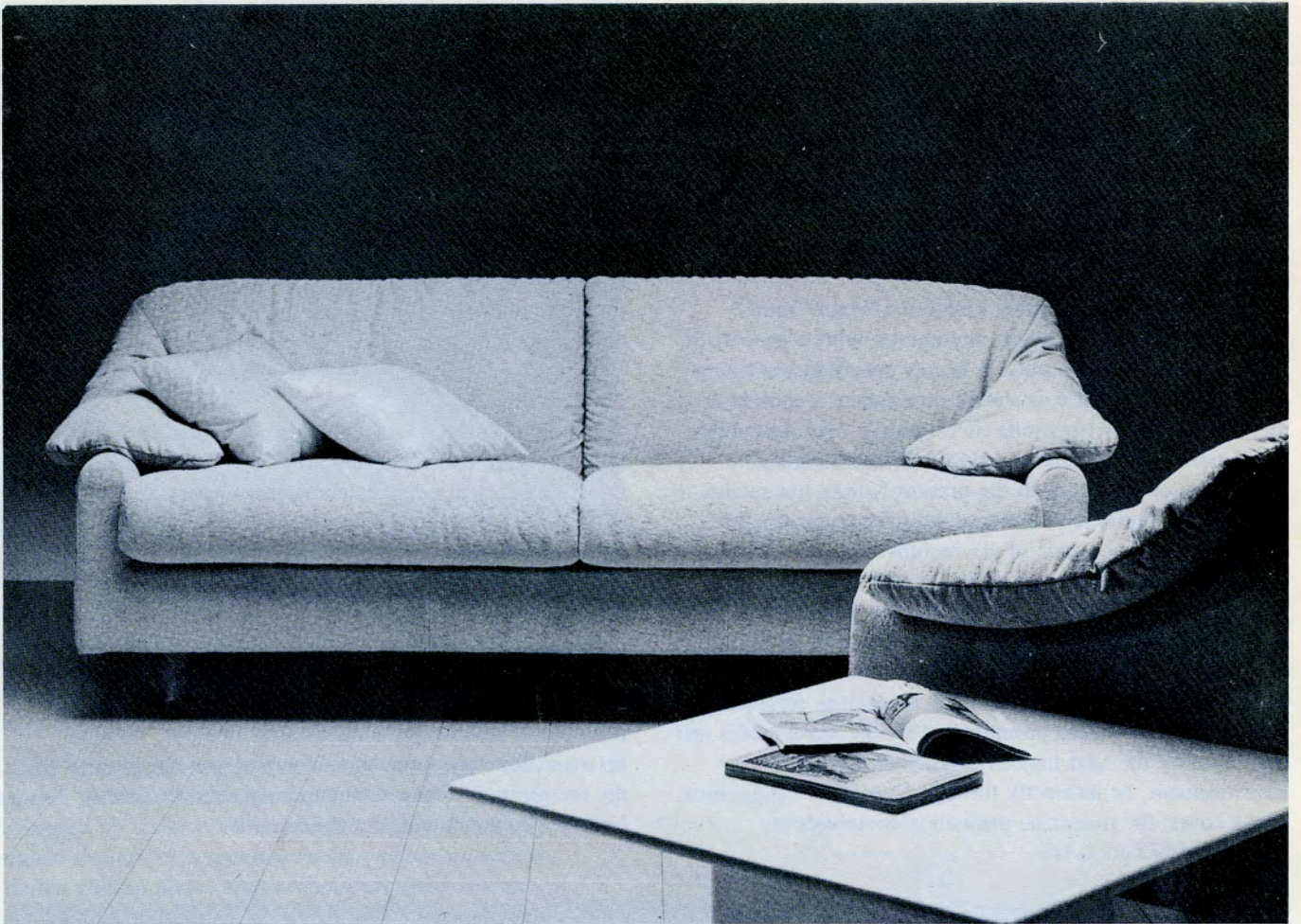
To a large degree the *Journal Series* depends on the recipient selected by Knight, whose own life style throws the character of the received magazine into relief. For example, magazines such as *1001 Home Decorating Ideas* and *Apartment Life* were sent to persons living in small or unpretentious quarters who basically were oblivious to the potentials of home improvement. In a Chicago apartment *Town and Country*, portraying the élite, has been casually set on an early 20th-century Arts and Crafts table adjacent to grillwork from the demolished Stock Exchange Building by Louis Sullivan. The sumptuous look of the magazine in this instance is juxtaposed with objects of an inherently sumptuous nature displayed in an otherwise modest environment.

Many of Knight's recipients are influential or established figures in the field of architecture and art. The architect Frank Gehry, of current international importance, received *Portfolio*, a periodical which superficially surveys the fine arts for an interested general public. If this magazine fills an empty space on the coffee table of one recipient, another may consider it insulting to their knowledge and expertise in the given field. One can merely surmise what might have been the reaction of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen to their subscription to *Art and Antiques*. The contrast is necessarily obvious, however, between the contents of this magazine and the pursuits of the recipients, a major contemporary artist and an art historian engaged with the avant-garde.

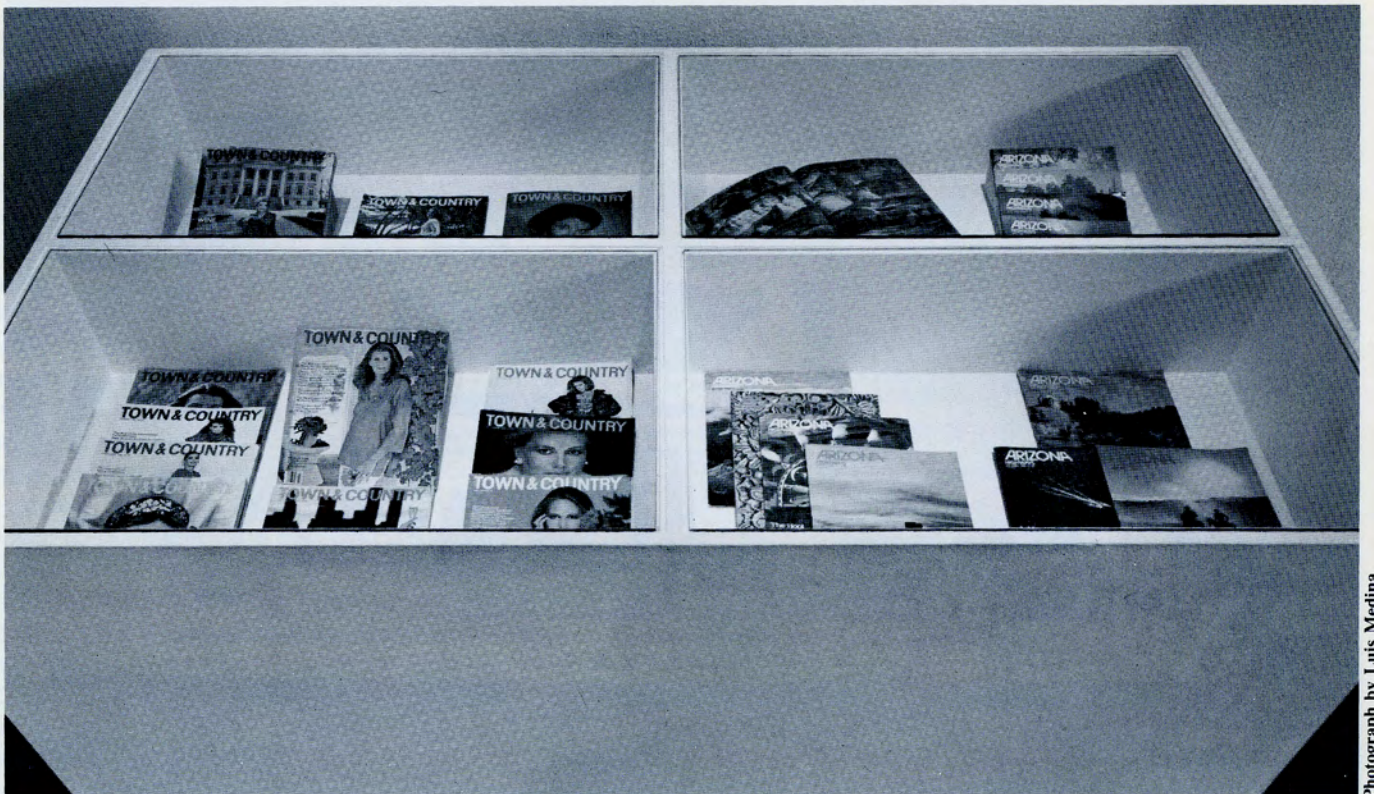


Photograph by Luis Medina

Journal Series, 1978-continuing. Installation at The Art Institute of Chicago, *74th American Exhibition*, 1982 (detail)



Tear sheet, furniture advertisement from *Abitare*, September, 1981



Journal Series, 1978-continuing. Installation at The Art Institute of Chicago, 74th American Exhibition, 1982 (detail)



Proposal for *Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981 (entrance to Ahmanson Gallery)



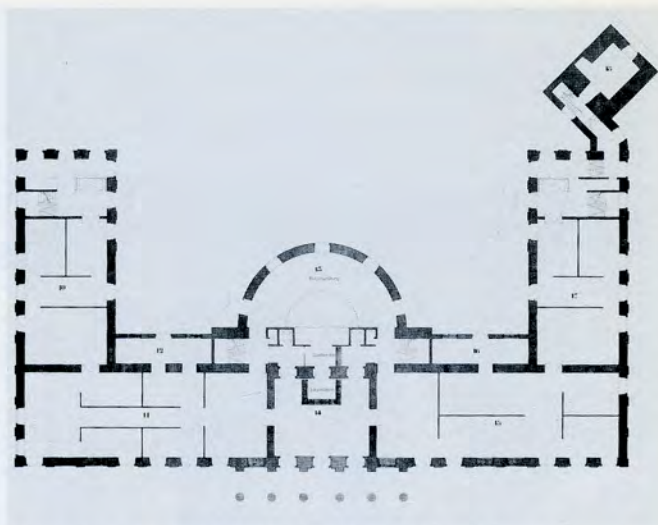
Proposal for *Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981 (view of sign with maquette of proposed bronze logo)

The interaction of the magazines' contents with the contexts into which they intervene operates on several levels. Potentially providing reading entertainment or practical information, the magazine in home or office may also serve as a decorative object beside a sofa on a coffee table, its colorful, handsome forms enhancing the decor of the room, and, less obviously, referencing the given interior with the "real" world outside as represented by the magazine set in this interior. Non-art by definition, the magazine, like art, nonetheless often plays a purely decorative, nonfunctional role as an object within an interior design.

The most salient characteristic of each journal is its manipulation of the principles of "good" design since every magazine is attentive to codified devices of formal and compositional arrangement. Each magazine displays its own stock of visual formulas be they luxurious interiors on the cover of *Home International*; variations on the 17th-century Dutch still-life theme used in depicting soups, salads and desserts on the cover of *Cuisine*; the ever-changing glamorous woman figured each month on the cover of *Town and Country*; or paintings themselves as cover decoration on *Portfolio*. Details are constantly altered, but ironically the visual conventions of each magazine remain constant so that superficial differences are subsumed into a cumulative impression of uniformity.

Since a magazine is an item of the moment, to be bought when issued and discarded when read, it is irreplaceable on the one hand, but intrinsically valueless on the other. Not obtainable after a certain date and subject to changing attitudes toward design, the magazine with time, however, may evolve into a collector's item, having acquired a certain value with age. The designation of Knight's magazine subscriptions as art underlines these paradoxical aspects and subjects them as works of art to the conditions attending precious objects or limited editions.

The exhibition of a select group of magazine subscriptions, recalled from their recipients for the Art Institute's biennial American Exhibition, amplified the questions posed by this work. The museum context with its protective vitrines and meticulous, self-conscious, decorative method of display unavoidably declared the journals be given their due as art, although for what reasons the work deliberately left open: as an appealing arrangement of color and form, as pictorial information, as design principles of the recent decade, as symbols of our cultural needs and desires, as documents of the tastes of the reader, as literal magazines? With all of the built-in conventions of each magazine's communication strategies, the *Journal Series* as a total work disrupts ingrained assumptions about the conventions of viewing art. Expressing the way in which modes of seeing operate in the art and non-art world, the work forces viewers, with their preconceived set of expectations, to re-evaluate how one registers what one sees, to reconsider not only how visual material is "read" but also by what means and to what ends different cultural value systems are visually conveyed.

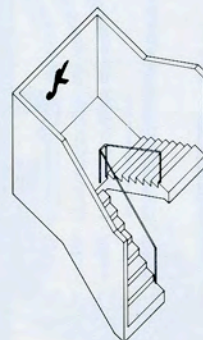
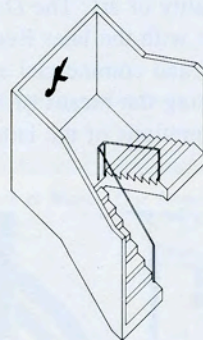
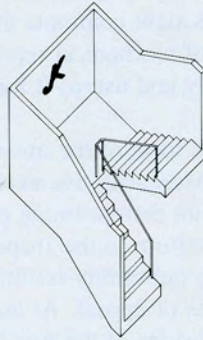
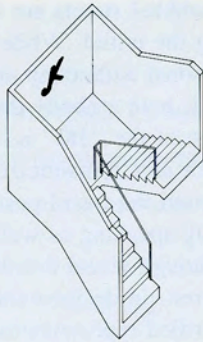


Ground Plan, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, West Germany

Like the Renaissance Society work, the *Journal Series* acknowledges the distinct but undefined dichotomy between art and non-art value systems. These two works are similarly based on the pretensions and commodity value of non-art, as witnessed by the desirability of ornamental plates or the allure of magazine graphics. In both instances, the objects and items considered as "art" thus come as a surprise, even though their decorative design value and use as decor is otherwise taken for granted.

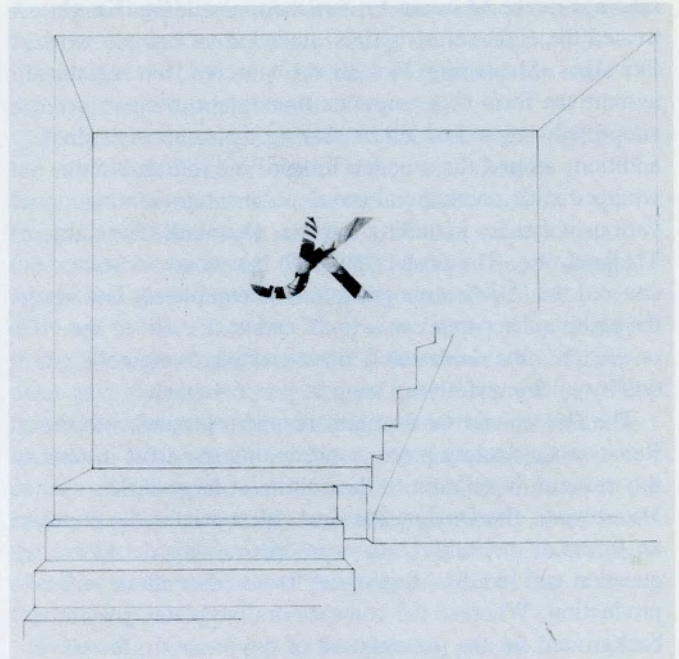
Both *Museotypes* and the *Journal Series* underline the importance of contextual considerations in the perception of art. Although they deal with issues of site and location in their separate ways, neither are "site-specific" works since they can function anywhere. For the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition entitled, *Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects* (1981) Knight's work, never implemented, would have been a site-specific piece, as required by the theme of the show. As his proposed contribution to the exhibition, he created a bronze logo for installation in two halves above and below the engraved lettering announcing "The Ahmanson Gallery" on the wall of its exterior entrance. Knight derived the shape of the logo from an ubiquitous motif – a four-sided shape with symmetrical, concave indentations – which is present throughout the museum's architecture. The cross section of its columns possess this shape as do the pavement, light fixtures and carpets.

Through the abstraction and reiteration of this design element existing within the fabric of the museum's structure, Knight produced a self-reflective symbol of the museum. The use of bronze as the material for the logo ironically links the piece with monumental sculpture, a tradition from which the work deliberately detaches itself. The bronze material tauntingly offers nostalgic reference to "free-standing" sculpture since this piece can only exist as an integral part of the institution which solicited it. The work derives its meaning from the specific institution in question while returning meaning to the museum in the form of a sign. Recognizing the power of a single emblematic design in our society, the work sought to present the museum with an image of itself.



Untitled, *Documenta 7*, 1982 (axonometric drawing of stair landings)

The Los Angeles County Museum proposal anticipates the Renaissance Society work because of its creation of an abstract shape from existing architectural form and through its equal identification of this form with museum and corporate imagery. In a succeeding work which he exhibited at *Documenta 7* (1982)⁵ Knight further pursued the implications of the corporate trademark, using its industrial, commercial associations as his point of reference. In similar fashion to *Museotypes*, the



Untitled, *Documenta 7*, (perspective drawing of individual stair landing)



Untitled, 1981

Documenta 7 work interweaves several separate ideas into an integrated whole. Occurring at four or five year intervals, the *Documenta* exhibition, a major international event, was founded with the intent of showing the most up-to-date art. In a letter to the participating artists, the organizers of *Documenta 7* outlined their concept of the large undertaking. All works were to be recent and were to be juxtaposed with works by other artists to create a lively interaction between varied artistic approaches. With their premise in mind, Knight selected the walls of the landings of two stairwells connecting the four floors in the main exhibition building for the installation of eight different but identically scaled wall reliefs in the shape of his initials, "JK." The stairway landings provided uniform rectangular wall areas where each relief could be seen on the visitor's way up or down. In short, Knight centered the work within the spaces leading to and from the main exhibition areas, in between, but outside of the officially designated art spaces.

By placing them on the walls of the successive staircase

landings of the Museum Fridericianum building, Knight treated the eight set of initials, intended as a single work, like signs. Measuring 24 x 30 x 1 7/8 inches, the initials assume the form of a corporate monogram, the two simplified, attenuated letters sharing the same stem. In addition, around the wooden form of his initials Knight wrapped slick commercial travel posters representing various countries including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Thailand, etc. The posters glued to the wood surface covered the "JK" monogram almost completely but where the rectangular paper came to an end at the tips of the "J" or the "K" the deliberately hand-crafted, "original" quality of the underlying support was revealed.

The *Documenta* work shares common ground with the Renaissance Society piece, representing the artist instead of the museum in relation to the culture at large. Like *Museotypes*, the *Documenta* work appropriates the popular art forms of mechanical mass production in order to question and redefine traditional forms of aesthetic production. Whereas the commemorative plates provide a background for the presentation of the museum, the travel poster – formerly an independent pictorial vehicle – is tailored to the form of the artist's initials, its colorful, scenic imagery reduced to an applied, decorative surface coating. The poster, contoured to the shape of the "JK" and no longer perceptible as a whole, loses its coherent visual image and specific promotional purpose. The "features" of one or another country's snow-capped

mountains or quaint cobbled streets are forfeited to the exigencies of covering the initial. While the initials, the final validation of personal authorship and ultimate sign(ature) of the artist, here embody the work, the poster as adapted to the shape of the "JK" no longer functions in its capacity as a sign or as a romanticized image of a place. The initials ground the travel poster, not only literally but figuratively speaking as well. Having lost its pictorial legibility, although visual details of lettering, format, imagery, etc. remain decipherable, the poster no longer stands as a glorified representation of a geographical region but now exists only as a decorative visual motif. In this work, therefore, Knight confronts the highly technical and proficient power of mechanical reproduction with its ability to govern reality and usurps it for the purpose of art.

The repetition of the form of the initials reduces their personal uniqueness. Moreover, the mechanically reproduced posters, with their seeming pictorial variety, once fragmented to conform to the shape of the initials, reveal their underlying uniformity resulting from their standardized techniques of appeal. At the same time the false, romanticized illusions of the mass media are channelled into the reality of art. The *Documenta* piece, once more comparable with the later Renaissance Society work, grafts a popular and commercial art form with "high" art, appropriating the means of the former in order to investigate the assumptions of the latter. In the process,



Un Travail en Travaux, A Pierre et Marie, Une Exposition en Travaux, Paris, 1983

A PIERRE ET MARIE

UNE EXPOSITION EN TRAVAUX

36, RUE D'ULM 75005 PARIS

CONCEPTION :

DANIEL BUREN, MICHEL CLAURA, JEAN-HUBERT MARTIN, SARKIS, SELMAN SELVI

2

DÉBUT :

DIMANCHE 20 MARS 1983 de 11 à 14 heures.

OUVERT :

VENDREDI, SAMEDI, DIMANCHE de 11 à 19 heures

AVEC LE CONCOURS DE LA DÉLÉGATION AUX ARTS PLASTIQUES.

Invitation card to *A Pierre et Marie, Une Exposition en Travaux*, Paris, 1983

Knight radically alters previous relationships and divisions between art and reality by inverting that “realistic” illusionism – which only mechanical reproduction can achieve – and turning it to his own ends.

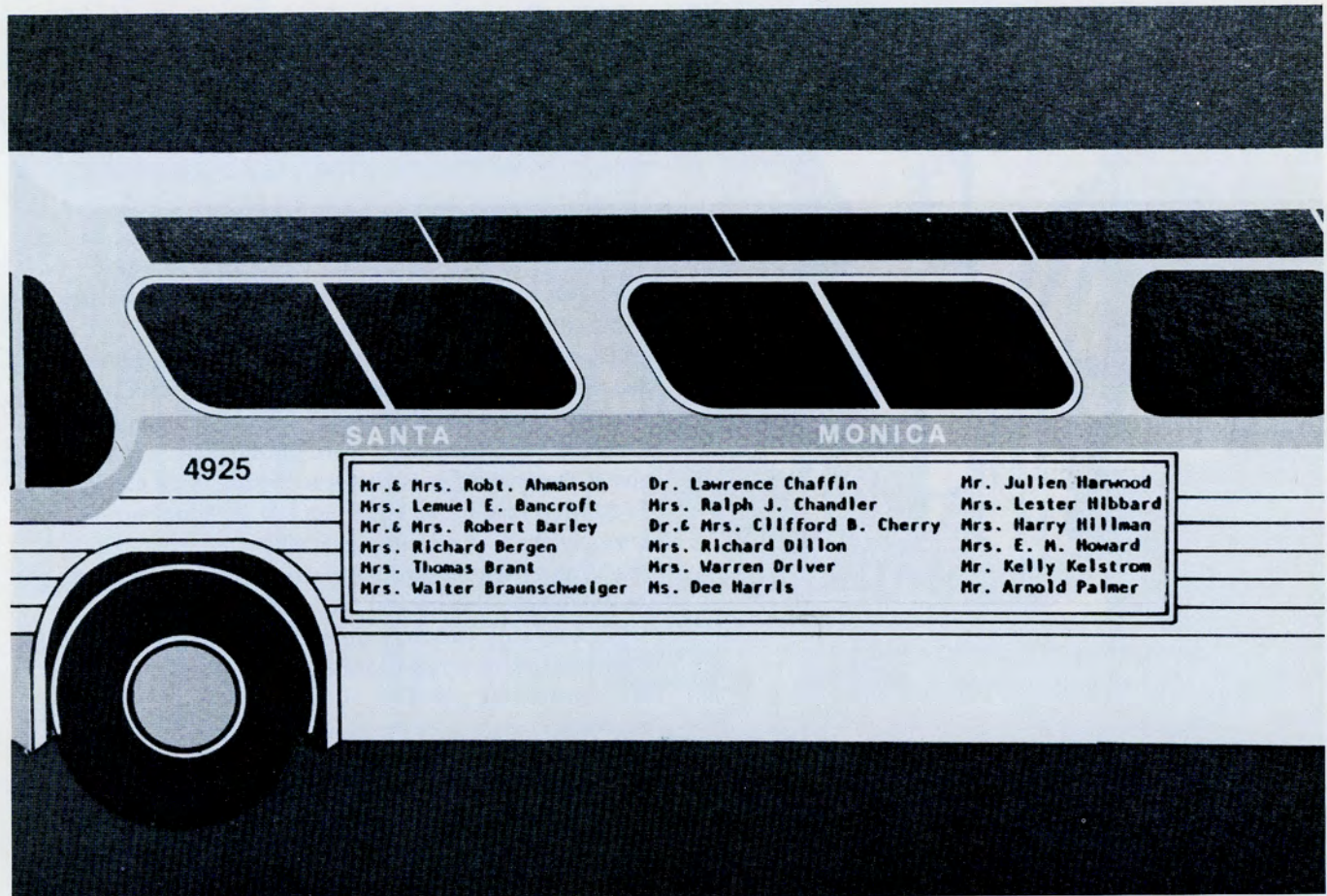
The placement of the initials in the stairwell landings of the exhibition building, where directional signs or functional objects such as emergency lights and fire-extinguishers might otherwise be seen, contributed to the totality of the piece. The “JK” letters, free-floating agents but not independent objects, activate or are activated by their context. The presentation of the initials in the non-art passageways of the *Documenta* building are what gave the work its edge since it both framed and was framed by the exhibition. Taking part in the exhibition by invitation, but situated outside of the conventionally delineated space, the work pointed to the importance of the entire display context. By remaining physically aloof from the exhibition yet directly connected with it, the work drew attention to the theory and mechanisms behind the “exhibition” of art.

Following *Documenta 7*, Knight took part in an exhibition organized in Paris in 1983 by a group of interested artists, critics, collectors and curators.⁶ The concept of the exhibition in conjunction with the particulars of the given space were essential factors in the realization of Knight’s work. The organizers of the exhibition invited a number of artists involved with experimental ideas in this country and abroad to use the interior and exterior spaces of an abandoned Paris church next door to the Curie Institute, which was slated for demolition because of projected expansion by the Institute. Neither staged in an official space nor organized under official auspices, the exhibition fell into the category of an alternative or “street work” exhibition. As Knight has observed, however, the announcement card for the exhibition fulfilled all of the requirements of a formally designed, traditional museum or gallery mailer. Since the graphics adopted for publicizing the exhibition, by mail and through street advertising, did not convey the free-form experimental potential of the exhibition site, Knight decided to create a work for the show which would give it the image that he felt was lacking in its publicity. To this end he built an eight-foot tall plywood barrier across the bars of the entry-gate which separated the churchyard from the street and which, during the course of the exhibition, was opened and closed each day.

Literally built into the exhibition, Knight’s work functioned as an actual and metaphoric facade in the form of a construction site fence. It answered, furthermore, to the double meaning of the exhibition’s title, *Une Exposition en Travaux*, (which the English translation, “An Exhibition in Progress/in the Works/under Construction” does not adequately convey), as did the title of his piece, “*Un Travail en Travaux*” (“A Work in the Works”). Functioning both as an actual fence and as art, the work represented the transitional nature of the area with the forthcoming demolition of the church. It also represented the character of an exhibition which did not take place within the formal museum or art gallery system but in the



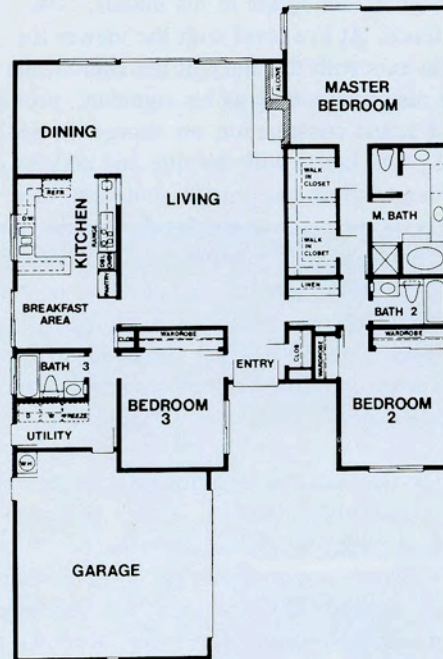
Proposal for an exhibition at the Otis Art Institute Gallery, 1976-77 (view of the Wilshire bus at Gallery stop)



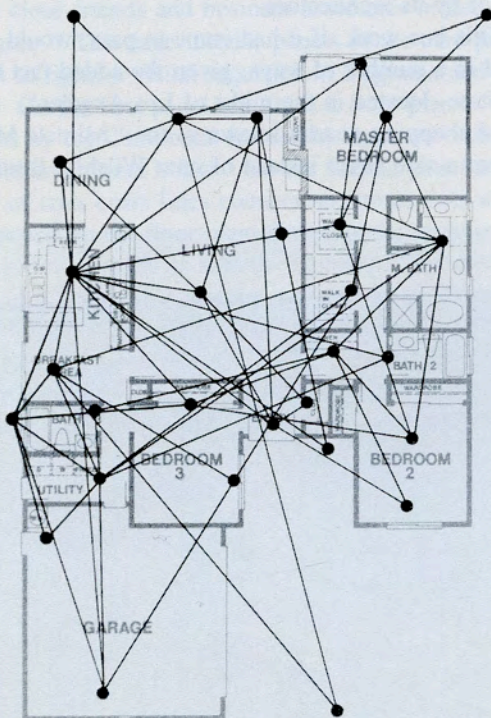
Proposal for an exhibition at the Otis Art Institute Gallery, 1976-77 (maquette for bus placard)

John Knight in collaboration with

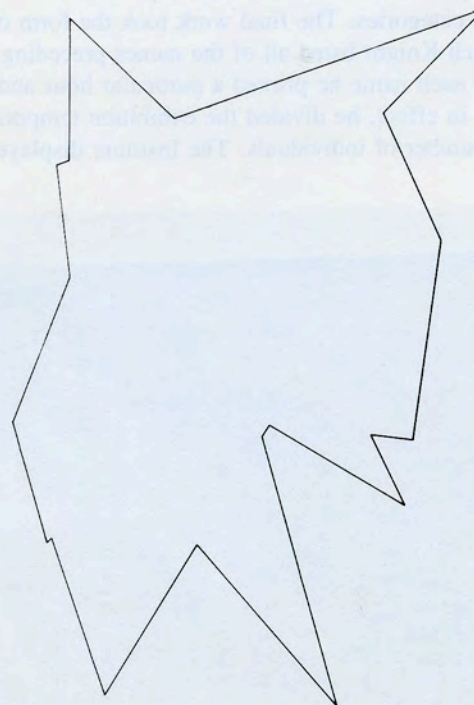
The Don and Maureen Campbell diagram to be applied in any metaphoric manner they wish. Thrilled by the realization of their first home, Don and Maureen Campbell decided to have a film made of their new environment. Don plans to send prints to close friends and business associates in lieu of Xmas cards.



All the arrangements have been made for production to begin the latter part of the month. The floor plan was supplied by the Campbells for use by the crew.



Ten days of production has provided an interesting body of film.



The Campbells like the film so much that they have decided to use it as a design for the rumpus room they had planned as an addition in the spring.

freer context of the street and with knowledge of the destruction of the building.

As an embellishment to the work, Knight cut the previously designed monogram of his initials, "JK," into the plywood fence. At eye-level with the viewer (or voyeur) and on axis with the entry of the church, the initials, while also functioning as his signature, provided a hole typical of actual construction site fences. In addition, Knight pasted paper labels with the title and address of the exhibition, enlarged from the printed invitation, in a straight line across the work at eye-level. He thus advertised the informational, advertising nature of the work itself, as billboard surface, at the same time as he created an image for the exhibition "behind" it. Being inextricably linked with the concept and context of the exhibition the work, with the exhibition's termination, loses its definition as art but retains its value as a fence.

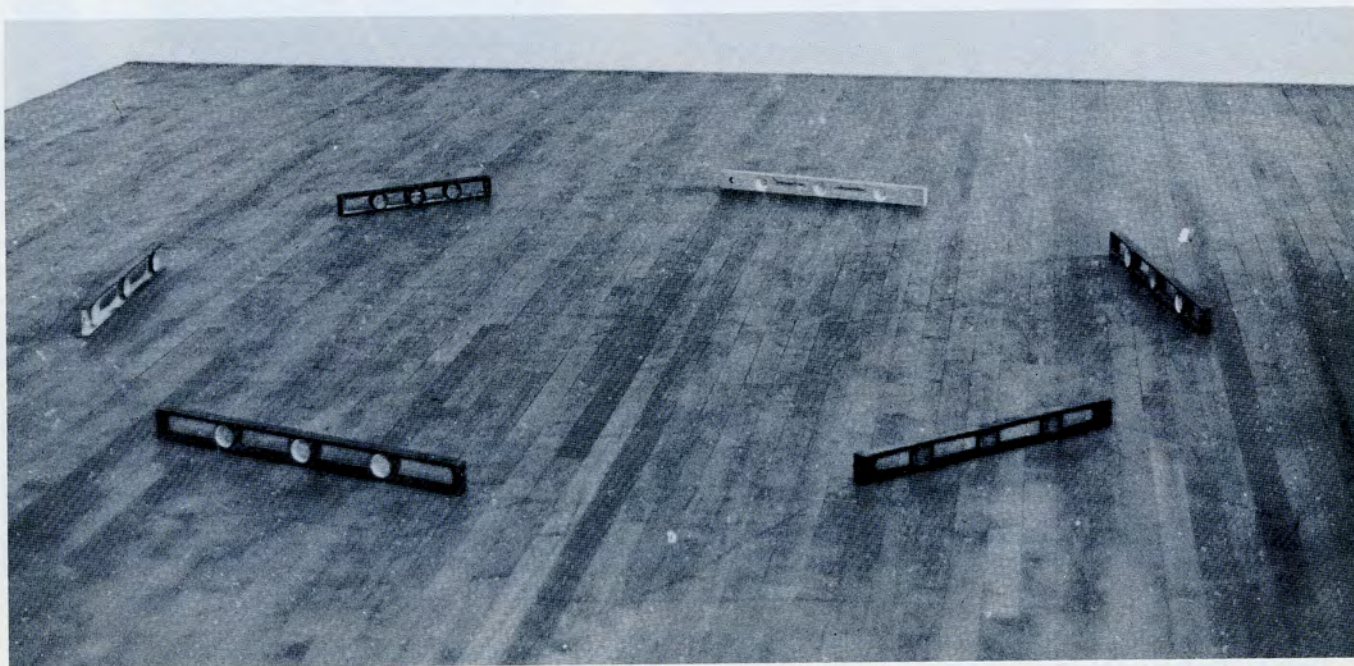
Un Travail en Travaux clearly relies on the inherent factors of the exhibition as much as it does on the existing physical space. As early as 1976 Knight had begun to conceive works which occurred outside of the confines of the traditionally allotted exhibition area, yet correlated directly with a specific event or institution. Knight's first proposal for his exhibition at the Otis Art Institute Gallery in Los Angeles (1977) affords further insight into his artistic method.

For the exhibition at the Otis Art Institute, Knight exhibited the mailing list of this gallery, presenting it in the manner in which it is actually printed – not simply in an overall alphabetical order, but in a sequence of membership categories. The final work took the form of a book in which Knight listed all of the names preceding his own. Under each name he printed a particular hour and day so that, in effect, he divided the exhibition temporally between a number of individuals. The Institute displayed

the book in the glass vitrine at its entrance throughout the duration of Knight's show. The preliminary proposal for the work offered another, more provocative dimension although this plan did not materialize. If Knight's original concept had been realized, the mailing list would have been printed to scale on the exterior advertising placards of Wilshire Boulevard buses which regularly pass the Institute.

The Otis work as first proposed anticipates *Museotypes* although the specifics of its tactics vary. While the bus placard, like the commemorative plate, furnishes an already existing visual communication system normally at the disposal of the mass media for commercial ends – in this case advertising – the bus provides the actual "vehicle" connecting the museum with society in general. Knight's appropriation of the mailing list as a major component of the work prefigures his later use of the museum ground plan in the Renaissance Society work. Just as the ground plan defines the museum through its architectural form, the mailing list delineates it as a social structure. Like the ground plans on the plates, the printed names on the placards of the bus assume a concrete formal presence of their own. In the members' mailing list for this Los Angeles gallery, the names of Hollywood celebrities are interspersed with unknown names, but the evenly spaced lines of print act as a leveling agent. The Institute's mailing list functions as an abstract, symbolic "form" of reference to the museum rather than as a direct social statement. The printed names thus signify the essential structure of this gallery as represented by its constituents instead of by its architecture.

The Otis bus work, if it had come to pass, would have operated in a number of ways, given the added fact that the Institute, located in the midst of Los Angeles' historical shopping district known as the "Miracle Mile," faces onto a side street instead of onto Wilshire Boulevard.



Untitled, 1969, artist's studio

A large, enclosed, glass window vitrine on the Boulevard side of the building, however, announces the Institute's events. During the course of the exhibition it would have displayed the Wilshire bus schedule and thereby reoriented the museum in relation to its physical and social situation in the community. The bus schedule exhibited outside on the wall of the gallery, viewed alike by exhibition visitors and people waiting for the bus, would have created a meeting ground for art and non-art viewers. The proposed Otis work thus re-presents the museum by means of external, non-art systems of display and in light of the social environment. It answers directly to its own "situation" in time and place, while escaping the static limitations of the free-standing object which may be manipulated indiscriminately within the traditionally allotted but unspecified exhibition space.

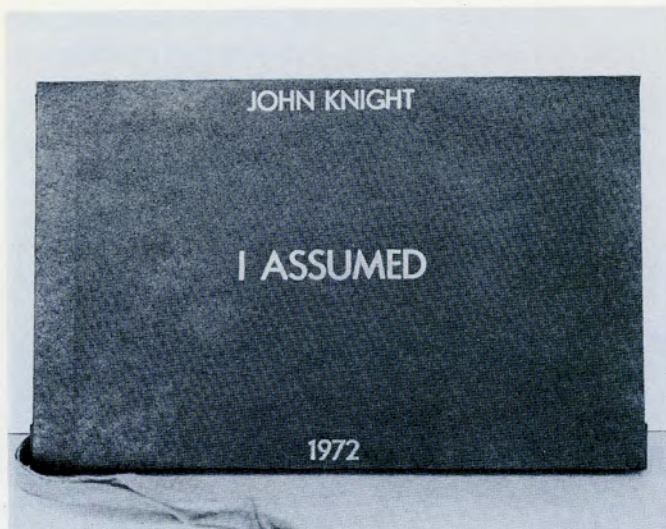
In 1977 the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art invited Knight as one of a number of participating artists and filmmakers to contribute to a special edition of their *Journal*.⁷ Knight submitted a fictional visual narrative, about Don and Maureen Campbell, which he later developed in a more complete form as a three-part folding card printed in an edition of 400. This work, resembling a greeting card in size and format, has a shiny cool green finish on the outside and a plain white matte finish inside. (A note explains: "The color selection was taken from the Campbell's master bathroom tile.") The front of the card sets the stage for the enterprising Campbells who "thrilled by the realization of their first home . . . decided to have a film made of their new environment . . . and to send prints to close friends and business associates in lieu of Xmas cards." The three interior panels of the card present, from left to right, a visual sequence in diagrams and subtitles. On the first panel one finds a floor plan "supplied by the Campbells for use by the crew" of a typical suburban tract house.⁸ On the second panel a network of criss cross lines connect numerous dots which, superimposed on the floor plan of the house, suggest the frenetic activity which its subtitle explains: "Ten days of production has provided an interesting body of film." The caption of the last panel identifies an otherwise uninterpretable jagged shape: "The Campbells like the film so much that they have decided to use it as a design for the rumpus room they had planned as an addition in the spring."

The irrationality expressed by the work gives credence to Knight's personal aesthetic, indirectly serving as a manifesto of his own artistic rationale. From their arty Christmas card idea to their desires for an out-moded rumpus room, the Campbells demonstrate the winds of changing fashion. Thus, on one level Knight parodies the shifting set of values which lead the Campbells from pseudo-creativity to absurdity, as witnessed by their outlandishly-shaped rumpus room. On another level, he indicates the potential meaninglessness of visual form – like the rumpus room, whether functional or not – that is arrived at arbitrarily through subjective decision-making processes.



Photograph by Frank J. Thomas

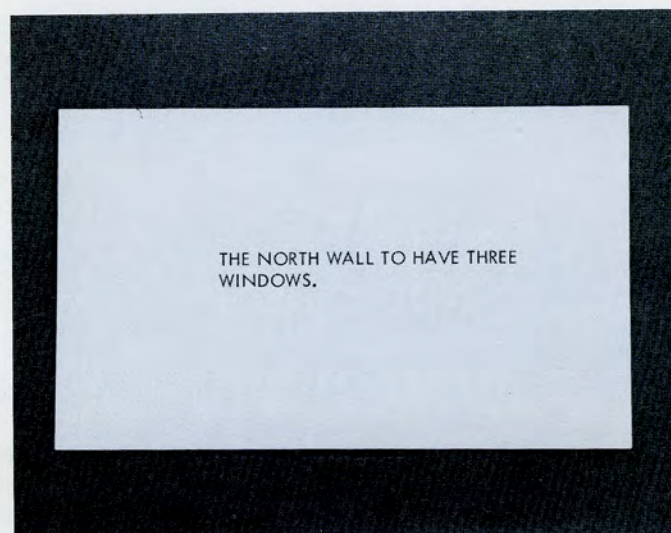
One Inch to a Foot, 1971. Installation at Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, 1973.



I Assumed, 1972 (detail)



I Assumed, 1972 (detail)



I Assumed, 1972 (detail)

From the outset of his career in the late 1960s to the present, Knight has developed work which is allied with and informed by existing reality. The "Level" pieces, among the first of his mature works, offer a prelude to his later thinking. Starting in 1968, Knight executed a series of primary structures out of standard carpenter levels which he placed on edge at regular intervals on the floor of his studio. For one work he arranged the levels in a square, for another in a circle, and for a third he positioned the levels end to end in a line across the room.

These works mark a major turning point in artistic practice of the period because of the way in which they relate to their environment, formally as shapes and functionally as levels. Following upon the innovations of the immediately preceding generation of artists, including Carl Andre and Donald Judd, whose work in the first half of the 1960s engendered new relationships between sculptural form and its attending physical space, Knight's "Level" pieces significantly expand these artists' ideas about the interdependence of work and site. His use of commercially available, non-art (but well designed) objects in the formation of these pieces is comparable to Dan Flavin's previous utilization of fluorescent light fixtures as the medium of his work. Unlike the work of Flavin, however, which both affects and depends on the allotted space, the "Levels" comment on their surroundings, without relying on them, by recording the topography of the site. Whereas the work of the earlier Minimal artists is essentially self-referential, the "Levels" – actual implements of construction here serving to construct – refer directly to their given location by registering reality in absolute and visual terms. The unequivocal interrelationship of useful object, abstract form and physical space distinguishes these works from prior artistic achievements while also setting a precedent for Knight's own ensuing concerns.

In succeeding early works such as *One Inch to a Foot* (1971) and *I Assumed* (1972), statements of fact similarly imbue the work with its resulting visual form. For the realization of the first of these pieces Knight installed a standard overhead projector on the floor of the Riko Mizuno Gallery in Los Angeles, where he exhibited the work in 1973. Having photographically etched the words "one inch to a foot" in one-inch Helvetica letters on a plate substituted for the regular glass plate of the machine, he projected this phrase in one-foot characters onto the gallery wall.

One Inch to a Foot derives its form from the interaction of its conjoined verbal and graphic content with its architectural context. The one-inch letters on the projector proportion themselves to the one-foot letters on the wall, while they visually engage the surrounding space. Applicable to any spatial situation, the work is self-contained, yet an integral part of its container. Furthermore, Knight's use of lettering – abstract configurations conveying literal content – lays the groundwork for his future involvement with a range of two-dimensional signs. Like an advertisement, but with nothing to sell, the elegantly lettered image projected on

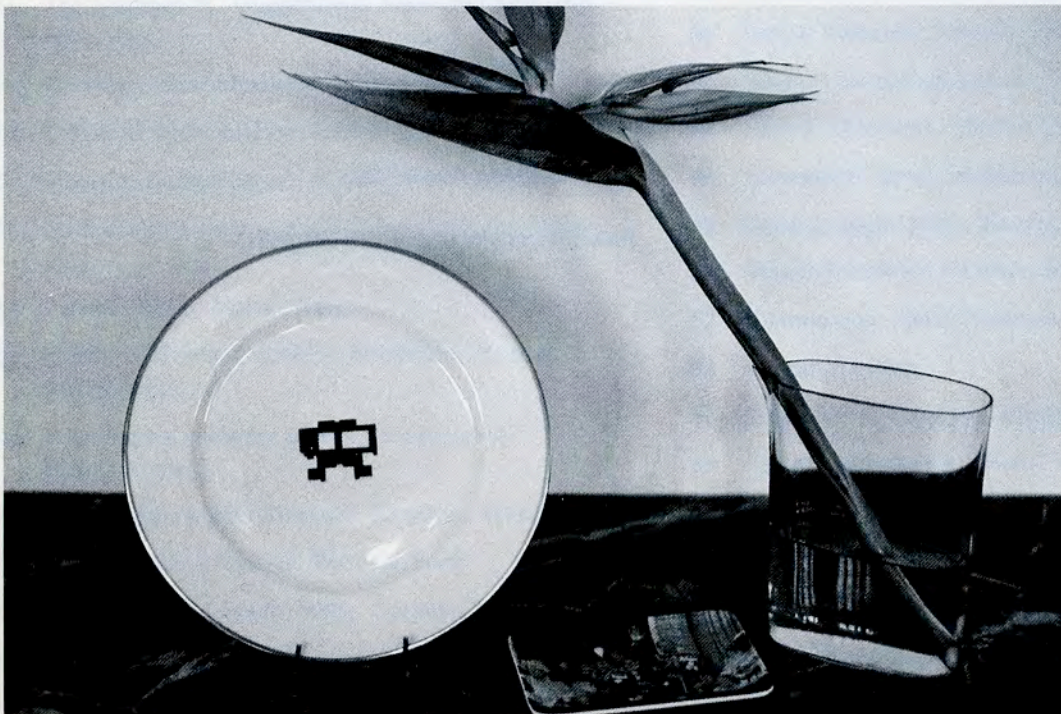
the wall pointed indirectly to the elegant, meticulously detailed architecture of the Mizuno Gallery.

Statements of fact take on a different form in Knight's slightly later work entitled *I Assumed*. . . . For this piece he printed approximately fifty statements on separate 3 x 5 inch index cards, which he exhibited together in a red expandable file folder. The work arose in response to an invitation from an early alternative space gallery, Project Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Without having seen the space Knight described a typical gallery by means of phrases such as "The space to appear new but be quite old," "The space to be on the third floor," "Three of the walls to be constructed of mortar and brick," etc. He thereby characterized exhibition spaces in general by means of language, typography and index cards, engendering alternative modes of representation and methods of display that are anchored to, but independent of, their referent.

John Knight belongs to the recent generation of artists who in radical manner have questioned previous approaches to making art. His ideas are comparable with those of artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner whose work derives its content from its context. Like these artists, he has abandoned traditional modes of painting and sculpture and further expanded their boundaries. Basing his work on contemporary social structures of all kinds and crossing the line between one value system and another, Knight utilizes existing systems of visual communication not generally connected with art. In the process of employing the conventions of given forms of representation and display not directly defined as fine art, Knight challenges and redefines artistic convention in order to offer new visual experience.

Notes

1. Harry L. Gage, Preface to *Trade-Marks Designed by Clarence P. Hornung*, New York, 1930, p. vi.
2. Lester Beall, "The Trademark: a graphic summation of individuality," *TRADEMARKS/USA* (exh. cat.), Chicago, 1968, quoted in Buzz Spector, *Objects and Logotypes: relationships between Minimalist art and corporate design*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, January 20 - February 22, 1980, p. 5.
3. Conversation with the author, July 1983.
4. See Anne Rorimer, "Introduction," *74th American Exhibition*, The Art Institute of Chicago, June 12 - August 1, 1982, p. 10.
5. Also discussed by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Documenta 7: a dictionary of received ideas," *October* 22, Fall 1982, pp. 124-5.
6. As stated on the invitation to the exhibition, the organizers were Daniel Buren, Michel Claura, Jean-Hubert Martin, Sarkis and Selman Selvi.
7. "The Don and Maureen Campbell diagram to be applied in any metaphoric manner they wish," *LAICA Journal*, April - May, 1977, pp. 28-31.
8. Procured by Knight from the Real Estate section of the *Los Angeles Times*.



Study for *Museotypes*, 1983

Recent Bibliography

Knight, John. *14 September—16 October 1977*. Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles, 1977.

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Biography

Born: Los Angeles, 1945.

Presently practicing in Los Angeles.

Numerical Checklist of Museum Plans

- 1 Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
- 2 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 3 Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan
- 4 Altes Museum, Berlin, East Germany
- 5 Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy
- 6 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 7 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
- 8 Glyptothek, Munich, West Germany
- 9 Shoto Museum, Japan
- 10 Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, Italy
- 11 Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 12 The Museum Yamato Bunkanan, Nara, Japan
- 13 Museum Am Ostwell, Dortmund, West Germany
- 14 Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome, Italy
- 15 Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth, Texas
- 16 The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
- 17 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York
- 18 Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Turin, Italy
- 19 Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas
- 20 Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, West Germany
- 21 Netherlands Pavilion, Park of the Biennale, Venice, Italy
- 22 Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy
- 23 Open-air Museum, SAFFA Exhibition, Zurich, Switzerland
- 24 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 25 Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas
- 26 Nationalgalerie, Berlin, West Germany
- 27 Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas
- 28 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
- 29 The Museum of the Treasury of San Lorenzo, Cathedral of San Lorenzo, Genoa, Italy
- 30 J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California
- 31 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
- 32 Gumma Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Gumma, Japan
- 33 Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 34 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
- 35 Museum of Central Finland, Jyväskylä, Finland
- 36 Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands
- 37 Kitakyushu City Museum of Art, Kitakyushu City, Japan
- 38 The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
- 39 The Gotoh Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 40 Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 41 Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands
- 42 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
- 43 Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain
- 44 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 45 Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt
- 46 British Museum, London, England
- 47 Musée National du Louvre, Paris, France
- 48 Vatican Museums, Vatican City
- 49 Kunsthalle, Bern, Switzerland
- 50 Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy
- 51 Museo Nazionale e Civico di S. Mateo, Pisa, Italy
- 52 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England
- 53 Mouse Museum
- 54 Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, Hungary
- 55 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria
- 56 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
- 57 The Hermitage, Leningrad, U.S.S.R.
- 58 Tamayo Museum, Mexico City, Mexico
- 59 Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- 60 Kunsthhaus, Zurich, Switzerland

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