

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



## ART COMMENTARY

by Marion W. Weiss

As the saying goes, "What goes around comes around." Examples: Carolyn Oldenbusch first saw Howard Kanovitz's groundbreaking paintings long before she subsequently met and married him. Joshua White's "Light Show," another avant-garde art form (which in this case helped define the 1960s) is still going strong to this day. Both Kanovitz and White (along with photographer/filmmaker Alyson Denny) are all featured artists in the annual Pollock-Krasner House series, "Artists Make Movies."

Not only are these works considered ahead of their time, they raise salient issues related to art. For example, how do moving images (movies/videos) reflect the artists' still images (paintings/photographs)? In fact, is there such a relationship? If there is, how does technology expand the artist's creative process?

In Oldenbusch's case, there's another pressing concern: preserving her husband Howard's legacy now that he has passed away. Such a connection to the past has provided a special journey for Oldenbusch. It started when she began a PH.D program in Art History at Stony Brook, where her

teacher, Malcolm Morley, suggested she go to New York to see shows. One of those exhibits featured Kanovitz, and she remembers saying, "I love this stuff. I know this person."

It was several years before Oldenbusch actually met Kanovitz; and for the years they were together, it was always their dream to archive his work. Oldenbusch hasn't given up the idea even after his death. While she used to work with her husband as a team, she must go it alone now. "I ask questions in my mind," she says. "I don't know if what I come up with is his or mine."

There are certainly lots of questions when it comes to Kanovitz's varied contributions to contemporary art. First, what were his influences? Was it his short sojourn in Hollywood working on a film project during the late 1950s? Was it a Master's degree at New York's Fine Arts Institute? Or was it his first show at the Jewish Museum in 1966 that coined the phrase Photorealism? Or perhaps it was an exhibit at Manhattan's Waddell Gallery in 1969 that initially caused the most stir? No doubt it was Kanovitz's large tableau painting there, "The Opening," with well-known members of the art world, that evoked early appropriation issues.

Yet, it was the first Documenta Exhibit in Germany (1972) with Chuck Close and Richard Estes that established Kanovitz as a Photorealist. Although Oldenbusch says he was "not crazy about the title," his art proved innovative, using photographs to investigate and represent reality. Kanovitz's work also challenged viewers to consider what looking at a painting was all about. And what looking at himself also means as his autobiographical documentary film *The Drive-In* proves.

The examination of both themselves and reality is a goal that avant-garde artists Alyson Denny

and Joshua White also pursue. With Denny, such pursuits may have started with her photography series, "Jelly Fish," created after September 11, where light coming through glass cast the fish as refractors. "Seaweed" and "Six Circle Variation," where the same elements are mixed nine different ways, are other photographic works that use examination and experimentation in special ways.

Even so, there are elements in Denny's photographs and films that create recurrence: theme and variation. For example, she and White's installation, "Alba," employs white as a theme. The variation? "Anything under the sun," Denny says. Such dynamics are related to music, of course, but Denny also connects them to gymnastics and tumbling, sports she dearly loves.

But Denny has had other influences, particularly associated with movement, like Robert Wilson's works where he slows down time. She also shares a bond with Jackson Pollock in her piece, "Half and Half and Honey," where her images sweep across the screen similar to when Pollock swishes his paint across the canvas.

The Pollock-Krasner House is an appropriate place for showing Denny's work, that's for sure.

*The Drive-In, by Howard Kanovitz, will be screened on Friday, September 23, at 7 p.m. Works by Alyson Denny and Joshua White will be seen on Friday, September 30, at 7 p.m.. Both screenings/discussions are at the Pollock-Krasner House, 830 Fireplace Road, East Hampton. 631-324-4929.*