

# Artists Shut Eyes For Joint Creation

By David Steinberg

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

SANTA FE — Don't be misled by the title.

"The Exquisite Corpse" has no cadavers spread out on the CCA's gallery floor. Nor is it a preliminary celebration for the Day of the Dead. An experimental visual arts collaboration, the exhibit at the Center for Contemporary Arts reveals are pieces of wood, rusted cans, strands of wire, rocks and rubber strips.

What's going on here? Quite a lot.

The exhibit's title is from an obscure quote in a turn-of-the-century parlor game of random phrases and words — "The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine" — played by groups of Surrealist artists in the 1920s and '30s.

The avant-garde Surrealist artists, largely based in France and Spain, used this game as a springboard for their own, often personal, artistic creations.

This is relevant to the art exhibit in Santa Fe in two ways — historical reference and inspiration.

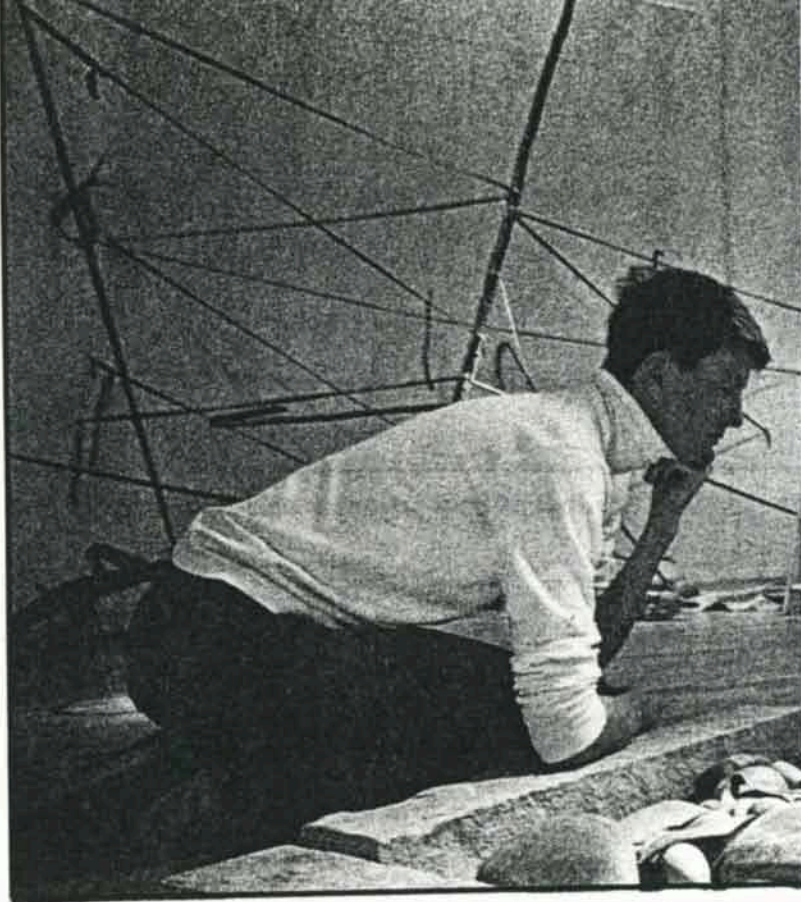
One version of the game involved four artists passing around a piece of paper on which each would draw a different image. After each sketch, the artist would fold over his art, leaving only a small gesture showing for the next person to see.

Only when the paper was completely unfolded did all of the artists see what the others had done.

"The folded paper is a great game to play with people. I've done it at parties," said Michelle Goodman, the collage artist who suggested the collaboration. "But I've wanted to do it more formally."

Goodman wanted to do it with the other three Santa Fe artists she got to participate in the installation — Bill Gilbert, Gina Telcocci and James Marshall, all sculptors.

"At every point, we've been watching our group make decisions," Goodman said. "We're very self-conscious about how we make decisions. Sometimes it's random



From left, artists Michelle Goodman, James Marshall and Gina Telcocci work on "The Exquisite Corpse," a collabora-

## WORK-IN-

## ... Divide

decision-making and sometimes it's talking things out."

The fact that four visual artists — each of whom is accustomed to working solo — worked as a team was a challenge to their egos.

"I work alone in my studio all day. No assistants. I tend to turn into a recluse," said Marshall. "This just sounded like a breath of fresh air."

"When I chose to work with these other people, I chose to give up what I normally do in the studio."

Each participant agreed to limit him or herself to four materials that could be used for the three-dimensional installation — rock, rubber, rust and roots. Roots was loosely interpreted to include wood. Each artist could use any or all of the materials but couldn't tell

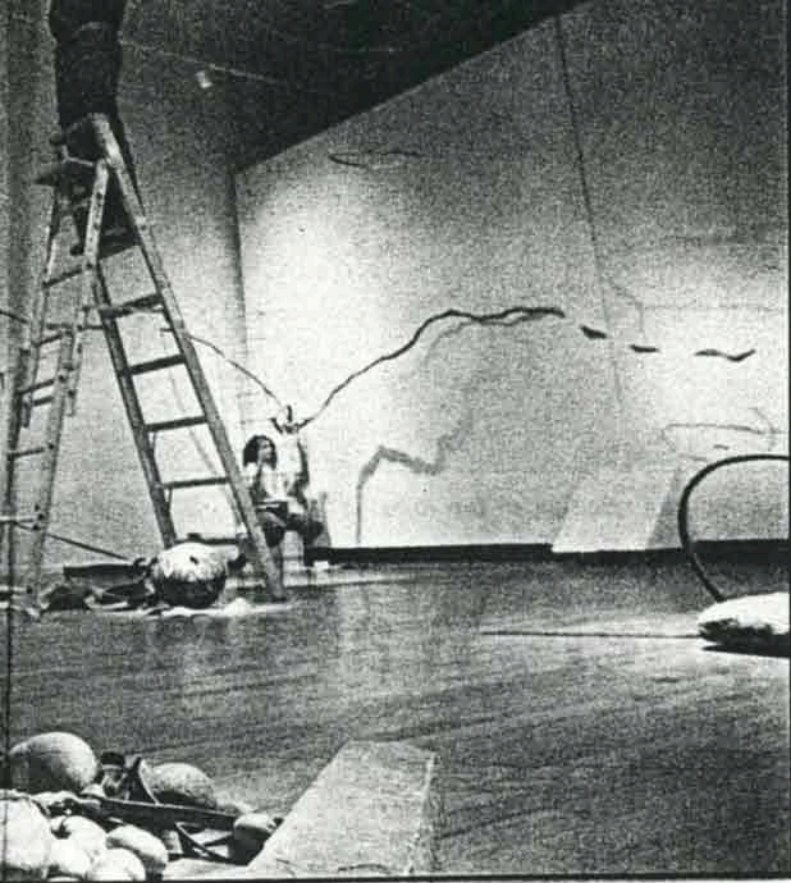
the others what he or she was using.

Marshall and Gilbert worked with materials not usually part of their repertoire. Marshall used wood and rubber; Gilbert, decades-old rusted tin cans that once contained paint or vegetables.

"I'm from the school that believes material carries a lot of information," said Gilbert, who teaches art at the University of New Mexico. "So rusted cans are trash, but trash that's gone through a slight recycling, exposed to the elements."

Telcocci said the material may be the strongest connection between the collaborators. "We each use natural materials and a lot of natural textures and colors," she said. "I use a lot of raw wood and I





MARK HOLM / JOURNAL

...tive work at Santa Fe's Center for Contemporary Arts. Not shown is participating artist Bill Gilbert.

# PROGRESS

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also paint it." A strong connection to the Surrealists' folded-paper game occurred in the initial phase of the "Corpse" project. Each artist spent one weekday alone working in the gallery before the exhibit had opened last week. Each covered his or her work behind a screen, leaving exposed only a small portion of what they had constructed, just as a gesture was left from the folded paper in the Surrealist parlor game. At this point, the "Exquisite Corpse" exhibit took off in its own original direction. By mutual agreement, each artist is entering the gallery alone on designated days with the intent of altering any of the art — his or her own, or that of the others —

that was created for the show's opening. Even that won't spell the end of the changes to the art in the installation. "During the last week the show is up, the four of us will go in together and rework the installation," said Goodman. The process of creating the show, she added, is as important as the show itself. "In fact, I have not separated out our making decisions about the show from the show itself or of dealing with the gallery." Another aspect the participating artists discussed was "process" is gender — that two men and two women are working in harness. The work viewers saw on the first day of the show may undergo a metamorphosis so radical that the exhibit may be unrecognizable

### ON EXHIBIT

**"THE EXQUISITE CORPSE: A Collaborative Installation"** by visual artists Bill Gilbert, Mitchell Goodman, James Marshall and Gina Telcocci will be presented through Oct. 18 at the Center for Contemporary Arts, 291 E. Barcelona, Santa Fe.

at the show's closing. Which raises another point this foursome is making. "This is a chance to work with 'change' as a basic truth," said Marshall. "It's a process showing viewers that form constantly changes and we are constantly changing."

"Unfortunately, in our culture there is an attachment to eternal youth, beautiful faces. Madison Avenue preaches this false doctrine of maintaining a certain image without change. The truth of the matter is we all get old, our teeth fall out, our bodies sag."

Because the participating artists deal with abstract rather than figurative images, Telcocci said they are not slavishly attached to the original installation.

"The fun part," she said, "is collaborating with people. There are so many ways of collaborating that you never know what's going to happen."

The sponsoring Center for Contemporary Arts gave each a \$250 artist fee.

Bob Gaylor, CCA executive director, said one mission of the center is to seek out and exhibit the art of promising artists whose work has not been publicly exposed to the degree it deserves. Another mission, he said, is to encourage new work not generally seen in other institutions, whether because work is larger in scale, or experimental or controversial or not part of a commercial gallery or a museum's purpose.

"Both are reasons why this exhibit is important," Gaylor said "and why we would continue to do such shows."

The various phases of the show are being videotaped and photographed to document the changing nature of the work.

The final phase of the exhibit — the ultimate change in the art — occurs when the show comes down.

The "Corpse" won't be moved and it's not being sold.

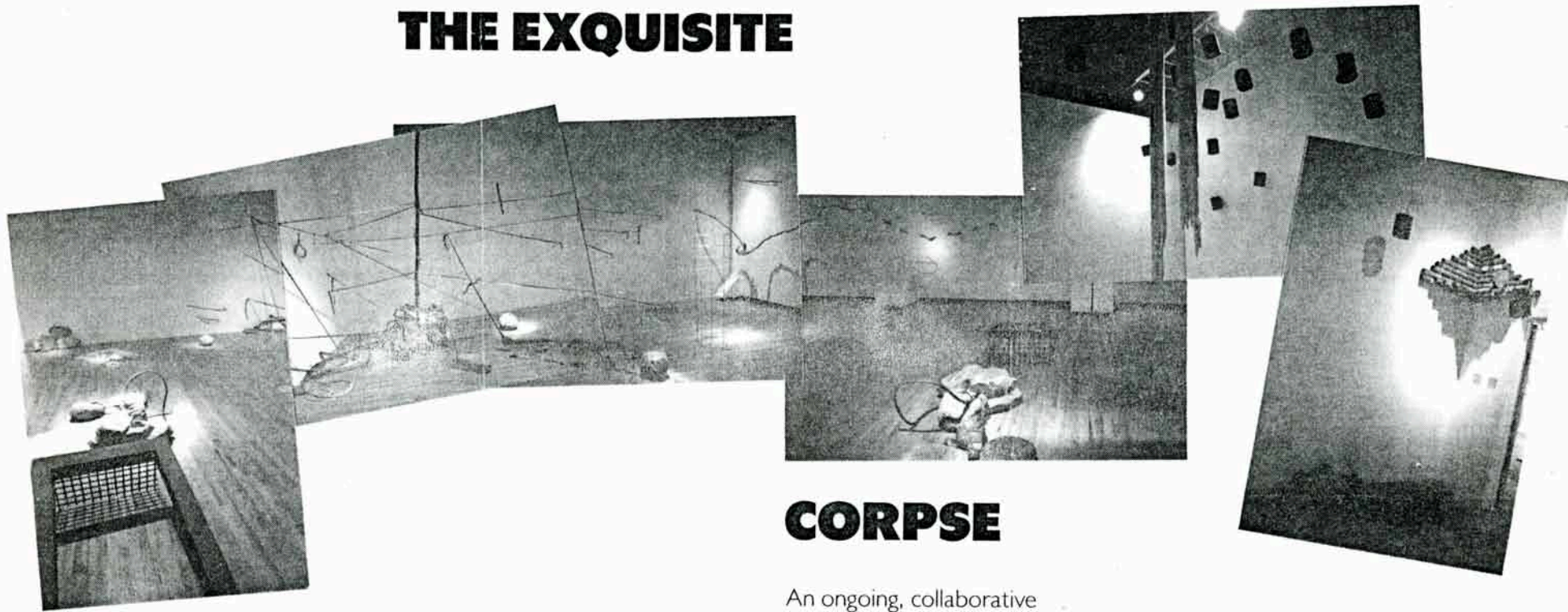
As with the human corpus, the installation will die.

It may, however, be reincarnated in other forms. The artists may try to find sponsors in other cities for installations employing similar groundrules.



The Center for Contemporary Arts presents

# THE EXQUISITE



## CORPSE

An ongoing, collaborative  
installation by

**WILLIAM GILBERT**  
**MICHELLE GOODMAN**  
**JAMES MARSHALL**  
**GINA TELCOCCI**

September 20 to October 18, 1991

## POETIC LICENSE/POETIC DISLOCATION

Perhaps the foremost dislocation that one could consider in the current, collaborative exhibition, **THE EXQUISITE CORPSE**, by William Gilbert, Michelle Goodman, James Marshall, and Gina Telcocci, is one of time. Approximately 70 years after the 'birth' of the first "Exquisite Corpse", comes another incarnation—connected in spirit and procedure if not in actual materials.

Michelle Goodman related that the original "Exquisite Corpse" as a visual art work came into being as a result of a parlor word game played by members of the surrealist group back in the 1920's. The exact rules of this game aren't clear except that words were juxtaposed in a random fashion. From one of these word games came the phrase: "The Exquisite Corpse Drinks the Young Wine". Four of the original Surrealists who played with the juxtaposition of random words: André Breton, Greta Knutson, Valentine Hugo, and Tristan Tzara, decided to enter into a different type of engagement with random procedures and gave the parlor game a visual spin by having each person do a drawing on a quarter of a folded piece of paper, and hence came the first "Exquisite Corpse" work which they named after the phrase arrived at through verbal play.

One obvious difference between the four Surrealists in the 20's and the present group of four artists at work at CCA is one of dimensionality. However, it must be emphasized that Gilbert, Goodman, Marshall, and Telcocci, while not using folded paper, have translated that idea by more or less working in CCA's large gallery via a conceptual process of "folded space". Initially, these four New Mexico artists worked 'blind' to each other's installation in their allotted gallery space. They installed on four consecutive days and after one artist was done, a huge screen was placed between her or his work and the remaining space until everyone was finished and the screen removed. The present group also limited their materials the way the original Surrealists did although the current choice of media for this "Exquisite Corpse" was in keeping with the sculptural nature of this exhibition. The materials Gilbert, Goodman, Marshall, and Telcocci chose were: rubber, rust, roots, and rocks. Goodman stated: "It was decided on before hand that each artist was free to use all the materials they wanted but that everyone would focus on one main one"; and so they divided the four ingredients along with the space. James Marshall was the first artist to install and he focused on rubber; Gina Telcocci was next and her choice was the roots; Michelle Goodman was the third person to work in the space and she primarily used rocks; Bill Gilbert's installation came last and he concentrated on using rust.

A second dislocation in regards to this contemporary "Corpse" has to do with procedure. Because of the ongoing, transformative nature of this current exhibition, there will be no fixed form to this piece until the last phase of construction is completed. In phase two, each artist will come back to the galleries one by one and re-work the entire exhibition as he or she wishes, including changing the work of the other three artists. In the final phase, which will be during the last week of the show the four artists will re-work the exhibition again, but this time arriving at all decisions in a collaborative manner.

Goodman emphasized that what this piece is really about has to do with 'process': the process involved in its conceptual phase; in its first presentation; and in the process of its ongoing transformation in time. She says that built into the framework of this project is "the idea that things are going to change through the exhibit because everyone's initial work is going to be changed by the other artists..."

As the concept of juxtaposition was at the heart of the original Surrealist practices, so too with this collaborative quartet as they juxtapose the "corpse" of a previous art historical event against the living present with their own "Exquisite Corpse" which will keep giving birth to itself.

**DIANE ARMITAGE**  
Visual Arts Coordinator