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Everyman's Infinite Art: Introduction and Harold Gregor Interview

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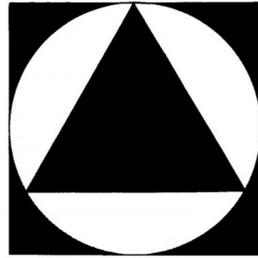
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ARTIST'S PROJECT Harold Gregor
Everyman's Infinite Art

The Art Department of Chapman College Presents

Everyman's Infinite Art



AN EXHIBITION TO BE HELD DURING THE CHRISTMAS RECESS (BECAUSE ITS APPRECIATION REQUIRES NO VIEWERS)
PURCELL GALLERY DECEMBER 15-30, 1966 ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

Introduction by Damon Willick

The works need not be viewed; they can be described in words. The works are unsigned and need not be bought; the patron can make his own.

– Harold Gregor, 1966

- 1. The artist may construct the work*
- 2. The work may be fabricated*
- 3. The work need not to be built*

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.
-Lawrence Weiner, 1969

In December of 1966, Harold Gregor and the faculty of Chapman College's Art Department organized the exhibition *Everyman's Infinite Art* in the school's Purcell Gallery. As explained in the exhibition catalog, *Everyman's Infinite Art* contained thirteen works that were meant to minimize the functions of the gallery, artist, and critic while challenging the prevailing assumptions of what works of art entailed. The gallery, in fact, was closed for the two weeks that the exhibition took place, thus making its catalog with its written descriptions of the art the art itself. In this issue of *X-TRA*, we present a reprint of the catalog along with an interview with Gregor and an essay by Lane Relyea.

It is important to remember that Chapman College in 1966 was far from the center of the American art world then firmly rooted in New York City. Orange, California, was not the cutting edge, yet *Everyman's Infinite Art* participated in, if not anticipated, the development of American Conceptual art of the 1960s.

Harold Gregor, then chair of Chapman's Art Department, framed the exhibition as an immediate response to the Jewish Museum's *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture* (1966). In particular, Gregor was most interested in Carl Andre's sculpture *Lever* (1966), a work that entailed 137 firebricks placed in a single file directly on the museum's floor. As Gregor wrote, *Everyman's Infinite Art* would extend Andre's line by "packaging an exhibit of this type of work," a type of work that could be described in language as easily as it could be made physically. As such, the catalog contained the written descriptions of the minimal and mundane work housed in the closed Purcell Gallery. It was the art's simplicity (its ordinary materials, simple composition, and

description) that made it for every man, thus *Everyman's Infinite Art*.

After its opening in December, *Everyman's Infinite Art* seemingly disappeared from history. In one of the few critical analyses of the exhibition, art historian James Meyer framed the show as a satirical misreading of Minimalism.¹ To Meyer, Gregor misunderstood Andre's *Lever* as more a Dada anti-art gesture as opposed to a serious formal extension of Modernist tradition. As Meyer wrote in his important study of Minimalism: "The Chapman professor believed that *Lever* represented an offensive simplicity in every respect. Because it was so visually impoverished, Andre's sculpture did not 'need to be seen.' It was so simply conceived that it could, in fact, be 'described in words.'"² Importantly, Meyer also credited Gregor with "paralleling" the emerging practices of New York Conceptual artists like Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, and Lawrence Weiner, arriving "at a similar destination from a position of antagonism."³

Indeed, Gregor's focus on the written descriptions of *Everyman's Infinite Art* predated Lawrence Weiner's *Statements* by two years, and as seen in the epigraphs above, Gregor writing that the proposals for the art need not be viewed by an audience or constructed by the artist resonated closely with Weiner's statement. Gregor's closing of the Purcell Gallery also anticipated by a few years Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery* at Los Angeles's Eugenia Butler Gallery.

I encourage you, however, to rethink *Everyman's Infinite Art* as more than mere satire and critique. As Meyer argued at the outset of his book on Minimalism, the art of the 1960s was a debate and an argument, not a coherent platform or unified field.⁴

X-TRA would like to thank Los Angeles gallerist Tom Jimmerson, who in a conversation with editorial board member Stephen Berens

brought *Everyman's Infinite Art* to our attention. Our reprinting of the catalog coincides with Chapman's restaging of the exhibition as part of the Getty initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980.

–Damon Willick

Footnotes

1. At the time of its opening, *Everyman's Infinite Art* received scant critical reviews. Grace Glueck did mention the exhibition in her *New York Times* "Art Notes" column by writing: "Wee Chapman College, out in Orange, Cal., is tickled hugely by the success of the no-viewer art show it held during christmas recess." See Grace Glueck, "Art Notes," *New York Times*, January 8, 1967, 118. ↵

2. James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 82. ↵

3. *Ibid.*, 83. ↵

4. Meyer, 4. ↵