



Allan McCollum. *Drawings*, 1989. Pencil on museum board, each unique. Installation: John Weber Gallery, New York.

## **ALLAN McCOLLUM: *DRAWINGS***

by Dena Shottenkirk

Allan McCollum presented more than 2,000 framed drawings, created from some 200 infinitesimally varied and variously combined plastic templates, in a dense salon-style arrangement. Though the repeated images sat mutely one next to the other, together they had the force of an invasion. With blind fecundity, McCollum's drawings seem to replicate without teleological intent or vanity of purpose. As in all of his work, the frightening specter of repetitive psychosis looms large. By presenting numerically limitless objects, all derived from the same host, McCollum presents a kind of user's manual for modern living. His project delivers the perverse joy of the identical lines in a K-Mart store, but divorced from use. It is consumption unalloyed by righteous needfulness; the bland presentation of the underbelly of capitalism.

Apart from the terror of the ultimate null set, McCollum is simultaneously presenting a picture of the sublime. He takes one step back from the image imbued with the collaring specificity of content, and places himself in a prior stage of production—the primary act of creation. The choking necktie of packaged meaning is stripped off, giving an airing to the thing in itself, a phlebotomy of esthetics. Artmaking is not the image of art imitating nature, but the act of individual creation mimicking the originary act of creation. As McCollum was recently quoted as saying: "Modern industrial production has always been more than just a making of things; it has always also been a highly orchestrated expression, a sort of epic dramatization of a wish, a wish we all share, a wish that we might be able to be as productive as nature."

McCollum's effort constitutes a foray into the subconscious urge to make, which in its generality is quite separate from the making of any particular object. Locked in a stasis of self-replication, mimetic in its very structure, his work images the urge itself. The emphasis has been shifted to the activity and away from the product. Of course, the delightful irony is that this shift merely results in more products; true to life, the machine goes on.