

*JADE DELLINGER:
INDEPENDENT CURATOR*

Interview by ALLAN MCCOLLUM

INTERVIEW WITH JADE DELLINGER
INDEPENDENT CURATOR
SEPTEMBER 21, 1998, VIA E-MAIL

INTERVIEW WITH JADE DELLINGER
INDEPENDENT CURATOR
SEPTEMBER 21, 1998, VIA E-MAIL

JADE DELLINGER: INDEPENDENT CURATOR

Interview by ALLAN MCCOLLUM

AM: So, Jade, do you call yourself an “independent curator,” or how do you describe or define what you do?

JD: Although I describe my practice as that of an “independent curator,” I usually tell the non-art-people I meet that I work with artists to facilitate projects. The art exhibition that gallery-goers and museum visitors experience is the end result of an often lengthy process not only for the artist producing the work, but also for those within both initiating and partici-

pating institutions. I function as a sort of go-between with the pleasure of not only witnessing, but contributing to the realization (and sometimes the evolution) of an artist's ideas. I have and will continue to curate exhibitions of pre-existing artworks, but there is a particular excitement in following a project from beginning to end—concept to fruition.

I will soon depart on a week-long trip with New York artist Keith Edmier to explore volcanoes, lava tubes and related flora in Washington State and Oregon. In this instance, there is interest on the part of the artist to learn about the aftermath of volcanic activity in this region, but the final product—artwork or project—has yet to be conceived. I've been invited to help carry the propane lantern and a camera into caves, and to make contact with possible collaborators should a "project" evolve or a bear appear...

AM: So it's this interaction with the artists that you find to be the most rewarding aspect of your work?

JD: It's all quite rewarding, but I particularly appreciate the opportunity to have on-going and meaningful interaction with artists. Artists have an extraordinarily insightful way of seeing and interpreting the world. I enjoy the constant challenge of grappling with new ideas via the art and through stimulating conversation with the individuals who make it.

AM: How do you select artists you work with?

JD: Artists occasionally propose projects, however, most of the time I suggest a particular context that could provide some unique opportunity based on my understanding of their interests or modus operandi. The artist is invited to conceive a work for a particular venue that could, but may not be limited to the more traditional museum or gallery space. But, in the end, we sort of select each other.

AM: Do you prefer working on specific "site projects" rather than showing works coming from the artists' studios?

JD: I'm most interested in the ideas and concerns that engage a particular artist. I guess there is a greater possibility for me to become involved (and to learn something about the artist) if the work is made on or for a particular site. However, there are many artists at the moment working outside of the studio—examining institutions or infiltrating the public domain—creating art that utilizes billboards, magazines, television and the World Wide Web. They are broadening the audience for art, making accessible the dialogue surrounding it and asking basic questions about how and why it's shown. It's a big job often necessitating the support and participation of project managers, arts administrators, coordinators, curators or whatever you'd like to label us. There aren't a lot of artists that care to concern themselves with the kind of convincing it takes to get a magazine to give up twelve pages for non-revenue producing, artist-designed page advertisements or major newspaper to give up \$180,000 worth of space for a year-long art project!

AM: What was the first "site project" you organized for a particular or non-traditional venue?

JD: The project that I produced in New York at HEREart in 1994 with Andrea Zittel's A-Z Administrative Services and Rudi Molacek while including other artists and a graphic design team was clearly conceived by the artists and produced for the site, but I'd say that Doug Aitken's "I'd die for you" video installation at the Pasco Art Center in Holiday, Florida was the first project that developed from conversations with the artist about producing a work for and within a specific community. The Pasco Art Center is really an old Florida home in the middle of a retirement village. Other projects soon followed through the U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum with Maurizio Cattelan, Rainer Ganahl and others that involved commissioning of linguistic services, painting the walls of the museum between exhibitions and an ideal Florida vacation...

AM: How did you learn how to do all this? Did you get training to do what you do?

JD: Well, I earned a Masters degree in Arts Administration from New York University following undergraduate studies in Art History and part-time employment with the Contemporary Art Museum at the University of South Florida in Tampa. As a senior at U.S.F., I moved to New Jersey to participate in The New York Semester on Contemporary Art, a program at Drew University in Madison. While there, I commuted daily to N.Y.C. and interned in the Curatorial Department at The Whitney Museum of American Art's former Equitable Branch. As a student, I had been actively interviewing artists, and the Drew University program allowed me for the first time to access their studios.

AM: Tell me about your research, and these interviews. You did them while you were still a student?

JD: Well, I attended a lecture by the founding Director of U.S.F.'s Graphicstudio, Donald Saff, at a Southern Printmaking Council Annual Conference while a first year student at the University of Florida in Gainesville. I had heard about and seen some of the prints produced by Graphicstudio, but was unaware of Graphicstudio's unique relationship to the University of South Florida and the access to its activity and artists purportedly granted to U.S.F. students. I followed up with a letter to Dr. Saff about a summer internship, and received instead a telephone call from Margaret Miller, then Director of the U.S.F. Art Galleries. Margie offered me a "directed study" through the Department of Art History to research Graphicstudio via the Art Galleries prints, proofs, archive and documentation...

AM: So, you never actually worked at Graphicstudio...

JD: No. Although, I do recall being really disappointed at first that there was no way to gain access to the studio itself. In the end, this inaccessibility became incentive for me to pursue in a more or less direct manner the artists that had not only worked at the University of South Florida, but with numerous other print workshops and publishers...

AM: How do you mean?

JD: I simply checked information for a number, picked up the phone and called them. In retrospect, I'm astounded at how generous most of these internationally famous artists were with their time and information in granting appointments with a student for interviews via telephone and fax. Of course, I was 19 years old and couldn't really afford to hop on a plane to meet with Roy Lichtenstein in New York or Long Island.

AM: Who was the first artist to give you an interview?

JD: The first artist that I interviewed by telephone, believe it or not, was Robert Motherwell. I later either spoke or corresponded with Jim Rosenquist, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Larry Rivers, Bob Rauschenberg, Tom Wesselmann, Robert Indiana, Ed Ruscha, Richard Diebenkorn, Robert Mangold, Chuck Close and numerous others. I learned so much from these conversations. I was getting a print-specific history of contemporary art from the source, so to speak—some of the most important artists making it. The focus on editioned prints and multiples was a means to make my inquiry credible as there seemed to be less interest on this important aspect of these artists' production. Most had dedicated many years and much attention to their investigation of print and multiple media through long relationships and associations with ateliers, publishers and even in-house printers—yet, I suppose they weren't as often asked about their editioned works. Few print catalogues *raisonne* existed for these major artists, and most of these publications were long out of print and/or in drastic need of updating. I remember Robert Mangold commented at the time, that he had never really seen more than one or two portfolios of his prints in the same room at one time...

AM: I don't really know much about this world, the world of editioned works. I've made huge quantities of art objects, but not as editions...mostly just as objects 'en masse.' But people who buy art, they always seem to think less of an artwork if it takes the

form of a large quantity of things. This has always seemed so strange to me...

JD: This is an aspect of your work that's always interested me. It's seemed to me to be less a problem for artists and more a problem in the market for art, at least when we talk about art editions. Robert Mangold, like Motherwell and many others, made etchings because there is something unique and magical about etchings (even though they can exist in multiple). Robert Mangold is an artist who had been given several retrospective painting exhibitions, and who had produced more than eighty printed graphic editions with numerous printers and publishers over a twenty-five year period. Yet, few had really cared to ask him specifically about his prints...

AM: What happened to all those interviews you conducted?

JD: I've published a few here and there with the British magazine "Printmaking Today" and they've been included in part (or referenced) in Kathan Brown's most recent book on Crown Point Press, Ruth Fine's Graphicstudio catalogue for the National Gallery of Art and elsewhere. I'm sure this research led me to my first job in New York, and years later to my curatorial collaboration with Margaret Miller and the U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum on the exhibition "[re]mediation: The Digital in Contemporary American Printmaking" for the 22nd International Biennial of Graphic Art in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

AM: Was your first job in New York? Did you work in an art gallery?

JD: As a graduate student, I worked with Julie Sylvester who had a gallery and was publishing editions. It seemed a logical place to seek an internship and later employment, as I felt quite familiar with not only many of the prints and multiples that she had published, but with the work of the artists with whom she had been involved. To have breakfast or lunch with the vary artists I would then read about in my evening classes at N.Y.U.

was an eye-opener. I'll never forget being introduced to Joseph Kosuth at an opening reception following my promotion to gallery director, and getting his "welcome to the art world, kid!"

While working with Julie, I met a gallerist who invited and paid me to curate several exhibitions of American and European artists in Seoul, South Korea. I was rapidly becoming disillusioned with the commercial gallery world (the "selling" part), and for the first time, came to the realization that I might just be able to survive working freelance as a curator and critic.

AM: Why have you resisted the opportunity in recent years to work within an institution?

JD: Institutions are often essential in facilitating the types of projects with which I've become involved, yet it's important to me to maintain my independence for the moment. Not being tied to a particular museum or gallery really allows me the leverage to work only with the artists that interest me in the settings that seem most appropriate and conducive. I don't know how long this luxury can or will last, but there are many artists that I'd love to work with and my relationships with institutions continue to grow and develop as more and more projects are successfully realized. Independent curating in New York is most often the activity of those looking for jobs, planning to open a gallery, trying out artists and/or a potential exhibition space. "Full service," "Custom Colors," "21 days in advance," and the other exhibitions that I organized in New York were largely about presenting the work of artists that had little exposure and no gallery representation in the United States.

AM: When you organize a project, or an exhibit, do you feel you want to contribute something to art history that is unique?

JD: I'm not sure that my primary objective is to contribute to art history. I think there have always been gallerists, curators, critics and art collectors that have made unique and substantial contributions, but most often they are talked about

in relationship to the artists that they wrote about, exhibited or supported.

AM: Are you especially interested in personally knowing the artists you work with?

JD: This is obviously the advantage of working on new projects with living artists. I have exhibited quite a few artists that I've not had the pleasure of meeting, but it's great when you have opportunity to speak with and about the work of an artist who you've followed. Most of the time, these exchanges provide some insight. Some of my closest friendships are with artists and most have sort of developed out of working relationships.

AM: Where did you grow up, and when did you become interested in art?

JD: I was born in Tachikawa (a suburb of Tokyo), Japan, but grew up in Florida. I had an eighth grade teacher that gave as a class assignment the task of selecting an artist and writing a paper about their work. I borrowed some slides that my mother had purchased on her first trip to Europe while in college, and gave a presentation on the paintings of El Greco. I never wanted to be an artist, but became fascinated with artists, museums and the objects they housed. My parents were from the very beginning extremely supportive of my interests.

AM: When did you start collecting art?

JD: I started collecting art in high school. I bought my first piece in 10th grade on my second trip to Europe (I had been to England and Scotland in junior high school with a touring soccer team). I was working at a grocery store sending all my paychecks to a gallerist that I had met outside of London and buying Salvador Dali limited edition prints. In my senior year of high school, I traded a few Dali lithographs for an original gouache study and several artists' books by the Father of Con-



Jade Dellinger working with Allan McCollum at Camp Blanding near Starke, FL.

ceptual Art, Sol LeWitt. I've collected something or other for as long as I can remember—always putting things together in an effort to understand them individually.

AM: What else have you collected over the years?

JD: Well, my great-grandfather was a famous baseball player, so I've always collected memorabilia related to his career with the Cincinnati Reds and New York Giants. I grew up attending old-timer baseball functions and autograph sessions as he was a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. It was really amazing as a child to see adults lining up to get my great-grandfather's autograph. On days that the family would be together, I used to go to the mailbox and spend the entire morning helping him respond to stacks of letters from his fans. The first museum experience that I can vividly remember was at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. My grandmother made a point of taking me to a prominently displayed glass vitrine that housed my great-grandfather's used glove, trophies, uniform and the like. It made quite an impression on me...

AM: Has your experience working in the print-selling world and with memorabilia had any particular influence on your interests in art?

JD: Yes. However, I'm not entirely certain that I would have put it all together without having discovered your work.

AM: How would you describe your part in the fulgurite project here at CAM?

JD: Well, I suppose I initially suggested to you this possibility of working on a project through the Museum of Science & Industry and U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum. I was aware of Margaret Miller's role in advising M.O.S.I. on a public art commission, and was quite certain she too would be excited about organizing an exhibition with you. I was around for the first meetings at U.S.F., M.O.S.I. and with Dr. Martin Uman and Dan Cordier. I stayed in an adjoining hotel room, shared meals at Denny's, and waited with you on bad weather for the duration of the two-month process of triggering lightning at the International Lightning Research Facility in Starke. I contacted Sand Creations in Sanford about production of the 10,000 fulgurite copies, and collaborated with you, Margaret Miller and U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum staff in the organization of the exhibition...

AM: So did you receive some satisfaction from working on the project?

JD: It was a tremendous pleasure and an incredible honor to have the opportunity to work with you on "The Event" for the U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum. This was both the most ambitious project I ever been involved with and the most rewarding.

AM: That's really nice to hear! I very much enjoyed working with you, also—I learned a lot from you!

Are you presently working on any other projects at the U.S.F. CAM?

JD: Yes, I am collaborating with Margaret Miller and the U.S.F. Contemporary Art Museum on several upcoming projects. In January, we will present the first solo museum exhibition in the United States of the work of the Atelier van Lieshout, and begin a project for the pages of the Tampa Tribune with William Wegman and others. In 2000, I will curate an exhibition for the U.S.F. CAM with several contemporary Japanese artists, and there are various other proposals in the works.

THE EVENT

PETRIFIED LIGHTNING FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA

A PROJECT BY ALLAN MCCOLLUM

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY
TAMPA, FLORIDA