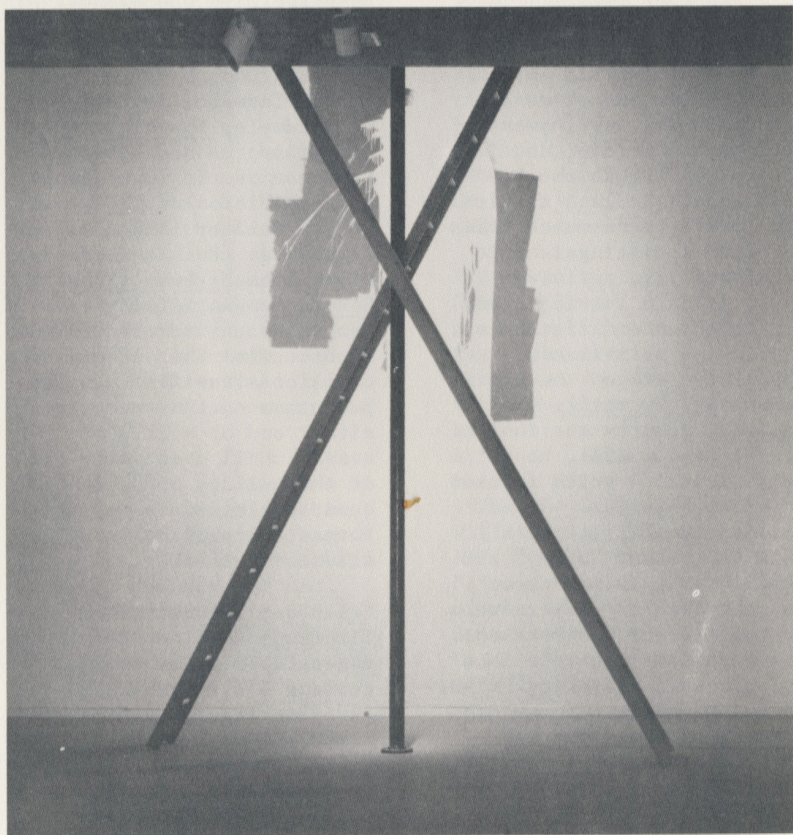


Fireman's Conflict Resolution, 1972-1982



Howard Fried ends the verbal text with which he accompanied his first public performance, All My Dirty Blue Clothes (1969), with the statement, "Every Action is a Potential Mistake." The phrase aptly expresses Fried's acute sensitivity to the complexity involved in the decision-making that directs his and, by extension, all of our actions.

Fried, along with Terry Fox, Paul Kos (MATRIX 36), and Tom Marioni (MATRIX 39), among others, has been a leader in the development of performance, video, and installation art in the Bay Area since the late sixties. The form a performance takes is often indistinguishable from real life activity. Thus, it is a fitting arena for Fried whose life and art are inseparably linked. When Fried staged the now famous Synchromatic Baseball game on the roof of his studio in 1971, he set up a situation which focused on group behavior. Fried divided the participants into two teams, "Dommy" and "Indo." The "Dommy" team was composed of players who at one time or another had played a dominant role in a relationship affecting Fried, while the "Indo" team was made up of those who had been more passive in similar relationships. None of the players was aware of the mechanics of the selection process. As Fried had suspected, the "Dommys" controlled the dynamics of the event more effectively than did the "Indos."

Fried is perhaps best known for his tightly structured and crafted videotapes and films. In fact, most of Fried's performances, such as

Sea Sell Sea Sick at Saw Sea (videotape, 1971) and The Burghers of Fort Worth (film, 1975-77), were created for tapes or films. The presence of an audience was incidental. The tapes and films go through a painstaking editing process during which the artist's original orientation may shift as previously invisible meanings and nuances are revealed.

Many of Fried's sculptural installations began as sets for performance activity. For example, Seaquick (1972) served as the set for a performance on the last day of its exhibition at the Reese Palley Gallery in San Francisco. This construction, like Fireman's Conflict Resolution in MATRIX 54, is a mechanical framework designed to determine the outcome of a conflict situation. In the performance, two men sit on either end of a greased seesaw until eventually one of them slides off. Subsequent decisions in the performance depend on which man slides off first.

Fried has reconstructed Fireman's Conflict Resolution three times prior to the current MATRIX exhibition, changing it each time as he moves toward a final resolution. The piece was first created in 1972 for an exhibition at The School of Visual Arts in New York called Performance Spaces. The installation consists of two long ladders crossing a greased pole. Unlike Seaquick, however, the piece was never actually used as a performance set. The three previous versions were accompanied by texts. The texts describe the way in which the structure can demonstrate

the three basic types of psychological conflict (approach-approach, approach-avoidance, avoidance-avoidance). The combination of the ladders and pole, besides acting as the stage or gradient for these conflicts, suggest "fireman." In the second installation (Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, 1978), Fried rolled red paint on the wall, which in juxtaposition to ladders and pole suggests "fire." In the 1979 permutation of the work (University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara), throwing a bucket of white paint on the wall (water on fire) became the final act. In the MATRIX installation the text does not accompany the piece; rather it has become a preliminary and independent vestige of the installation. This reflects Fried's recent emphasis on unwritten language, as well as perception and scale.

Several other refinements of the piece distinguish this installation from its predecessors. One is a method by which the size of the paint roller used in the installation is determined by the measurements of the wall; another is a choreographic formula for actually applying the red paint. Though the viewer remains unaware of the complexities of the decision-making involved in its creation, appreciation and comprehension of Fireman's Conflict Resolution is achieved through the viewer's intuitive understanding of the artist's logic. This piece manifests the elegance and refinement of detail characteristic of Fried's work.

In Consummate Failure, the text to a previous museum installation, Watershed (1977), Fried recognized a set of dynamics which are operative in all museums. The following quote from an interview refers to Watershed and its text but could apply to Fireman's Conflict Resolution as well. "In installation works in museums, the museums take some kind of role. And the more conscious they are of the fact that they are doing that, the better the situation is for everybody. The real content of certain pieces is, you know, the place they happen to be." (White, Robin. "Howard Fried," View, Oakland, Calif. December, 1979.)

Fried was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1946. After attending schools in the East, he moved to San Francisco to enroll in the San Francisco Art Institute where he received a B.F.A. in 1968. As a graduate student at UC Davis (M.F.A. 1970), he studied with William Wiley, Robert Arneson, and Manuel Neri. Fried is currently chairman of the Video/Performance department at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX:

Fireman's Conflict Resolution
1972-1982, construction with
ladders, paint, and pole,
19' x 10'6" x 9'7½" (dimensions
vary according to site).
Lent by the artist.

Bird's Choice, 1982, plywood,
paint, staples, paper, 2
panels, 31½" x 71" each.
Lent by the artist.

Selected one-person
exhibitions:

Reese Palley Gallery, SF '70,
'72; Reese Palley Gallery,
NY, '71; de Saisset Art
Gallery & Museum, Univ. of
Santa Clara, CA, '72; San
Francisco Art Institute, '72;
Nova Scotia College of Art &
Design, Halifax, Canada, '72;
San Francisco Museum of
Modern Art, '77; Projects/
Video, The Museum of Modern
Art, NY, '79; and/or,
Seattle, WA, '81; A Space,
Toronto, Canada, '81.

Selected group exhibitions:

Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, W.
Germany, Prospect 71
Projection, '71 (cat. pub.);
Friedreicianum, Kassel, W.
Germany, Documenta 5, '72
(cat. pub.); Everson Museum
of Art, Syracuse, NY,
Circuit, '73 (cat. pub.);
Kunsthalle, Cologne, W.
Germany, Projekt '74, '74
(cat. pub.); ICA,
Philadelphia, PA, Video Art,
'75 (cat. pub.); Whitney
Museum of American Art, NY
Biennial Exhibitions, '77,
'79, '81 (cats. pub.); San
Francisco Museum of Modern
Art, Space/Time/Sound--
1970s, '79 (cat. pub.);
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,
'60/'80 Attitudes/Concepts/
Images, '82.

Selected bibliography about
Fried (see also catalogues
under exhibitions):

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"Howard Fried: The Paradox
of Approach-Avoidance," Arts
Magazine (Summer '71).

Bear, Liza. "Howard
Fried: The Cheshire Cat,"
Avalanche (NY) (Spring '72).

"Howard Fried,"
interview. Art and Artists
(London) (Jan. '73).

Plagens, Peter.
Sunshine Muse (NY: Praeger,
'74).

Kleb, William. "Art
Performance: San Francisco,"
Performing Arts Journal
(NY) (Winter '77).

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History of California
Performance: Part One," Arts
Magazine (Feb. '78).

White, Robin. "Howard
Fried," View (Oakland, CA)
(Dec. '79).

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