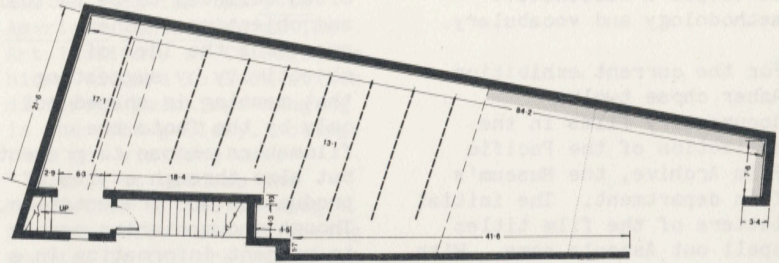


Installation, Gallery 1, 1983



Michael Asher rejects the role of the artist as a maker of objects. As a conceptual artist, he is primarily concerned with ideas. His works are entirely preconceived and executed by others. In the late sixties, Asher created installations in which he explored the architectural properties of specific spaces. His works have become more theoretical over the past decade, and although he shares certain attitudes with such conceptual artists as Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham and Daniel Buren, he has developed a distinctive methodology and vocabulary.

For the current exhibition, Asher chose twelve documentary films in the collection of the Pacific Film Archive, the Museum's film department. The initial letters of the film titles spell out Asher's name. With the assistance of the Museum's design department, he then designed posters listing the production credits of the films. Each of the twelve posters in the exhibition is printed in a typeface that begins with the same first letter as that of the given film, e.g., the poster listing the credits of The Living North is set in Lubalin typeface.

Asher's works can be characterized by their relationship to specific contexts. When conceiving a work, Asher takes into account all aspects of the conditions of its presentation, including not only economic restraints and the size of the exhibition space, but also the function, history and character of the institution. Each work, therefore, has meaning only within the situation for

which it was developed.

Asher's concern in this work is with the way meaning is produced. Taking the movie poster as a model, Asher eliminated the image and expanded the production information to focus on the film's structure and on the people whose work shaped the raw material of the documentary subject matter. According to Asher's point of view, the identity of the individuals responsible for making a documentary film is especially significant, because documentaries are often believed to be factual and objective. Asher questions the idea of objectivity by suggesting that meaning is shaped not only by the facts the filmmakers choose to present, but also through styles of production and presentation. Though documentaries appear to present information in a straightforward, "styleless" way, the information is in fact colored by camera angles, musical backgrounds, editing, scripting, and so on. By differing the typefaces, he calls attention to the significance of style on meaning.

Asher's works reveal facts not readily known or easily perceived. The revelation can be architectural--as in his 1973 work at the Galleria Toselli in Milan, where he had layers of paint stripped from the walls to expose the original plaster surface--or functional, as in his piece for the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, in which he made public the business operation of the gallery by removing the wall dividing the exhibition area from the office and storage space. The aspect of Asher's work that has to do with revealing

the hidden facts of a situation relates him to the German conceptual artist Hans Haacke. Haacke's most controversial piece, created for The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in the early seventies, divulged that many of the museum's patrons were also New York City slumlords.

To understand Asher's works, the viewer must actively participate in unravelling their meaning. Asher believes the viewer completes the artwork in the process of viewing it. In a piece he did in 1982 for the 74th American Exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago, he hired viewers to look at two different paintings hanging in the same gallery, noting that the visitors were "...able to witness the completion of the viewing process while actively being engaged in the process themselves."

Asher was born in 1943 in Los Angeles, where he currently lives. He received his B.F.A. degree from UC Irvine. Since 1975 he has taught at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. His book, Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979, written with the collaboration of B.H.D. Buchloh, will be published late November by the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design.

Constance Lewallen

Work in MATRIX:

installation with 12 posters
1983

Selected one-person exhibitions:

La Jolla Museum of Art, CA, '69; Lisson Gallery, London, '73; Galleria Toselli, Milan, '73; Claire Copley Gallery, L.A., '74; The Clocktower, NY, '76; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, '77 (catalogue with essays by M. Asher, B.H.D. Buchloh, R.H. Fuchs); Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, W. Germany, '82 (catalogue ed. by G. Strock); Museum of Contemporary Art, L.A., '83.

Selected group exhibitions:

Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials, '69 (catalogue ed. by J. Monte & M. Tucker); The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Spaces, '69 (catalogue ed. by J. Licht); Kassel, W. Germany, Documenta 5, '72 (catalogue), Documenta 7, '82 (catalogue, essay by Coogje Van Bruggen; Venice, Italy, Biennale (Ambiente), '76 (catalogue, essay by G. Celant); The Art Institute of Chicago, 73rd American Exhibition, '79, 74th American Exhibition, '82 (catalogues, essays by Anne Rorimer; Cologne, W. Germany, Westkunst (Heute), '81 (catalogue); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Artists in the Sixties--The Museum As Site, '81 (catalogue, essay by S. Barron).

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Battcock, Gregory. "Politics of Space," Arts Magazine, Feb. '70.
Ratcliff, Carter. "New York Letter: Spaces," Art International, Feb. '70.
Lippard, Lucy, ed. Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Artwork (NY: Praeger, 1973).
Wortz, Melinda. "Looking Inward: Claire Copley Gallery, L.A.," Art News, Dec. '74.
Foote, Nancy. "New York Reviews: Michael Asher--The Clocktower," Artforum, June '76.
Rorimer, Anne. "Michael Asher: Recent Work," Artforum, April '80.
Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. "Documenta VII: A Dictionary of Received Ideas," October, Fall '82.

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