

THE ART OF POSING

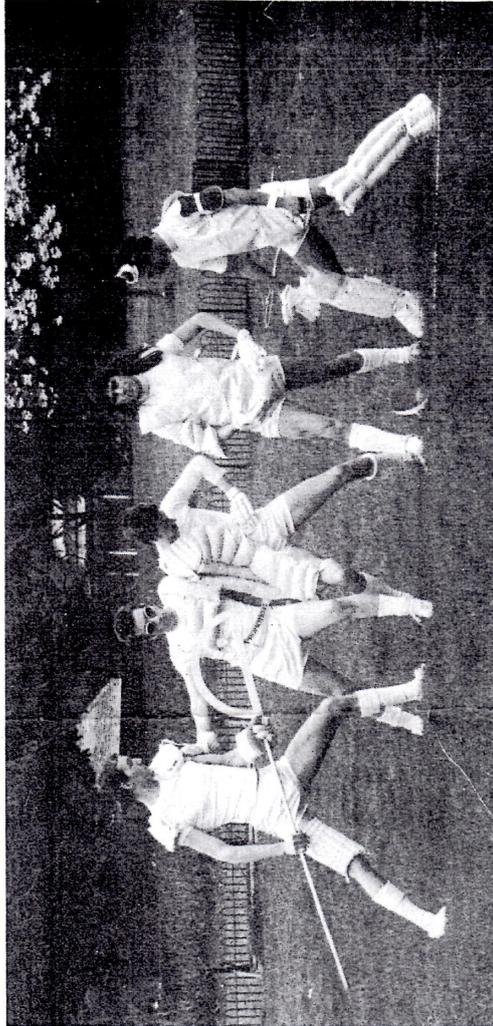
In 1970 Bruce McLean reviewed an exhibition of '60's British sculpture which included Anthony Caro; the mentor of the New Generation Sculptors from St Martins Schools of Art. Polemically describing the work as 'Crumble, Crumble', he defined the latter thus:

'It is a sort of ease, style that some people have, cultivate a bit because they know when they've got it, work on it; it has to do with 'craft' tricks, then perpetuating the tricks, never quite letting them completely boring.

Those who possess this talent have the best chance of becoming the International con men who make up the 'Art Scene'.

This statement could well be used to describe McLean's own work since 1972 when he formed 'Nice Style, the Worlds First Pose Band'. With performances like *Academic Board: A New Procedure* (1977) and his latest *Masterwork/Award Winning Fish Knife*, a Performance Sculpture for the theatre, performed at the Riverside Studios in 1979. McLean, sculptor and conceptual joker seems happy to present a polished show to a passive audience...or is he? An audience prepared for the theatre will remain complacent despite the efforts of writers like Brecht. When McLean was asked in an interview with William Furlong what he wanted the audience to go away with having seen one of his performances, he replied 'smiling and thinking'. That is, he wants his work to amuse but not necessarily to entertain, to be seen at first glance as easy but not as explicit as first assumed.

In the same way that the American Allan Kaprow saw his Happenings as potentially creating a spectacle that would unite the visual qualities of a plastic (ie.



consumer since both performer and spectator experience the piece simultaneously, unlike a static painting, sculpture, the written word or a musical score. This is not quite true of McLean's *Masterwork* in that he plays the reputable director and choreographer of a quasi-Wagnerian spectacle. He employs the impressive ingredients of a large live band playing a consistent, often grandiose score by Michael Nyman, uses his stock materials of ropes, scaffolding and in this case powerful lifting gear, close circuit tv, taped voice-overs and a group of performers made up of professional gymnasts and dancers.

What McLean does achieve in the *Masterwork* is the performance artist's firm conviction that *process* is superior to

McLean's debt to Dada and Happenings is indubitable, though his only admitted influence is Edward Kienholz, the sculptor and creator of Environments of the absurd. The dada scene of irony and provocation is evident even in this highly-polished *Masterwork*.

In the original Dada performances or manifestations as the French called them, the audience was a collectivity to be challenged, seduced or mocked by what Dada placed before them. McLean is not as rude as Tristan Tzara but he is 'naughty' giving his work the same hermetic, inclusive and anti-bourgeois sense. On the instruction 'And Enter' John James confronts the audience with an inaugural address resembling a didactic

same time frustration of the public towards public architecture and 'I'll try to buy as much as I can of the Minimalists' — a reference no doubt to capitalism forcing the consumerist issue even on that which apparently cannot be bought.

But these physical movements, gestures and positions affected by the performers are not confined in their references to art. McLean has said that the original ideas and concerns of the Nice Style Pose Band which still permeate his work were based on how positioning and posing becomes important at all levels of society. McLean's choreographed 'posing' explores ideas about status and hierarchy and serves to illustrate 'how positions are elevated through certain

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Tanya Leighton

sculptural) work with the intensity of action in an actual lived event, McLean sees his performances as an extension of his work as a sculptor. However, despite the fact the *Masterwork* like the American Happenings is a semi-theatrical spectacle that recalls some of the Dada manifestations, the result does not fulfill some of the basic premises of Performance Art. For one thing, Performance Art as a medium (here I include the bizarre Dada actions in the first two decades of this century and the American Happenings of the '50's and '60's as well as live work today which goes under the unfortunate label of Performance Art) is supposed to reduce alienation between the producer and the

the *product*, shifting the emphasis away from art as a finished product and focusing attention directly on to the actual process of creation itself. The saving grace of all McLean's work is the element of humour evident in his tongue-in-cheek method of creating the whole piece around the ostensible 'building' of the *Masterwork*. The whole performance is expressed by the Architect, represented by an ex-Nice Style Pose Band member who moves throughout the piece in a robot-like fashion using automatic measuring gestures and who is accompanied by a tape of architectural clichés like 'proportional, balanced, harmonious, restrained, modest, spare, elegant, functional...'

architecture: 'Goodbye Brunelleschi, Hello Talow'. During the performance the Community and its inherent fickleness within which the *Masterwork* is built, is represented both by the wonderful dancing and gymnastics of the Fat Man and the 3 Friends and corresponding tapes: 'I wasn't consulted about the building' reflecting the complacency and at the

of objects and manipulation of space. We took simple things, like a person making an entrance, but presented it formally so that it became clear that an ordinary and everyday activity might symbolically represent a person's status and position, or rather their view of their status and position'.

McLean noticed at St. Martins in the

