

and images seem too distant from us despite the theatre of war that was dramatised and narrated for us day and night. As suggested earlier, it is the silences and disappearances expunged by a culture of spectacle that becomes difficult to register. One simple framed photograph of text by Sophie Ricketts seem to touch upon this predicament. It read, 'Music swells. Curtains'. That means we have come to the end. ■

David Burrows is an artist and lecturer at UCE in Birmingham.

■ Allen Ruppersberg

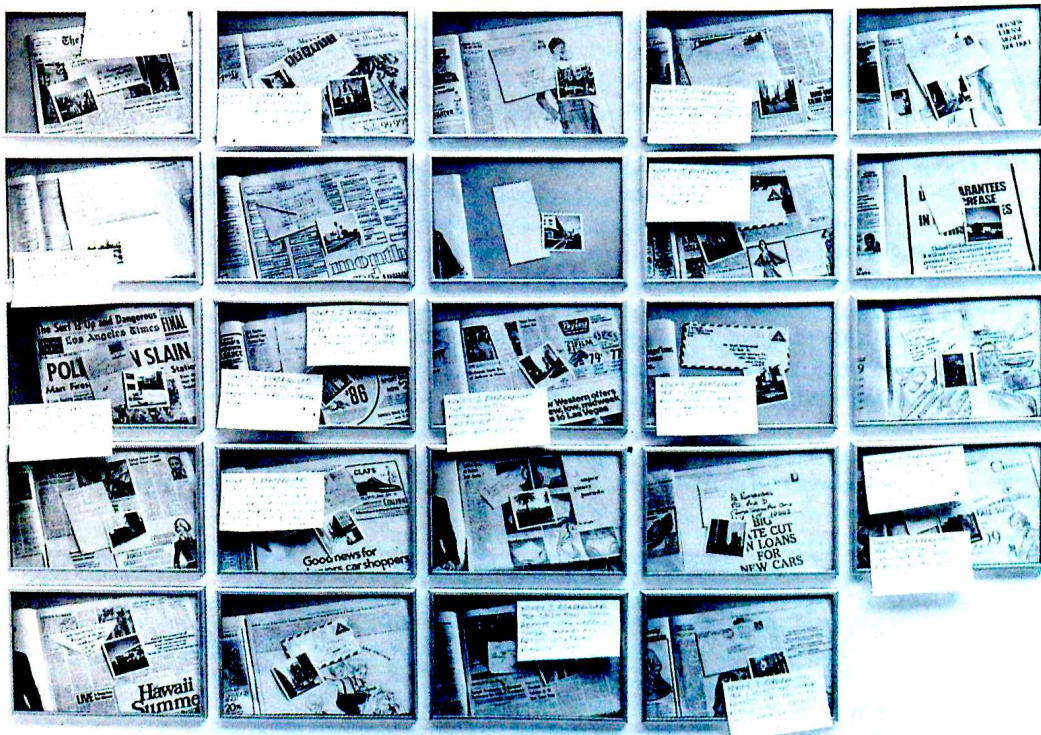
greengrassi London May 27 to June 30

Death (particularly by suicide) and reading books are two favourite themes that have come up over and over again in Allen Ruppersberg's work since the late 1960s. Suicide is fascinating, claims the artist, because it reveals a final mystery: 'the last private thought' before dying. And reading, like art-making, is a great creative act, because 'books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written' – or so advised Gustav Thoreau, one of the authors whom Ruppersberg has read most closely.

I learned all this while thumbing through the hard-to-find catalogue for Ruppersberg's 1985 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles, which delivers a strange mix of the artist's timeless subject matter – life, literature, art, selfhood – with a peculiarly specific cultural moment: early 1970s West Coast Conceptualism. This is an especially enticing time and place; exotic and hip, it distracts you constantly from the heavy or nostalgic subjects that Ruppersberg often chooses, like Oscar Wilde, Harry Houdini, André Breton, Life and Death. In the catalogue these old-time referents of Ruppersberg's segue with sunny snapshots of the artist's young friends, circa 1972, all beach hair, swimming trunks and Califor-

nia smiles, cavorting around freeways and summer bungalows. The resulting atmosphere of the catalogue is delightfully schizophrenic, its flow of non-sequiturs irresistible, and it prepared me for the freedom in Ruppersberg's work to swing blithely across opposite, unconnected moods and moments in history.

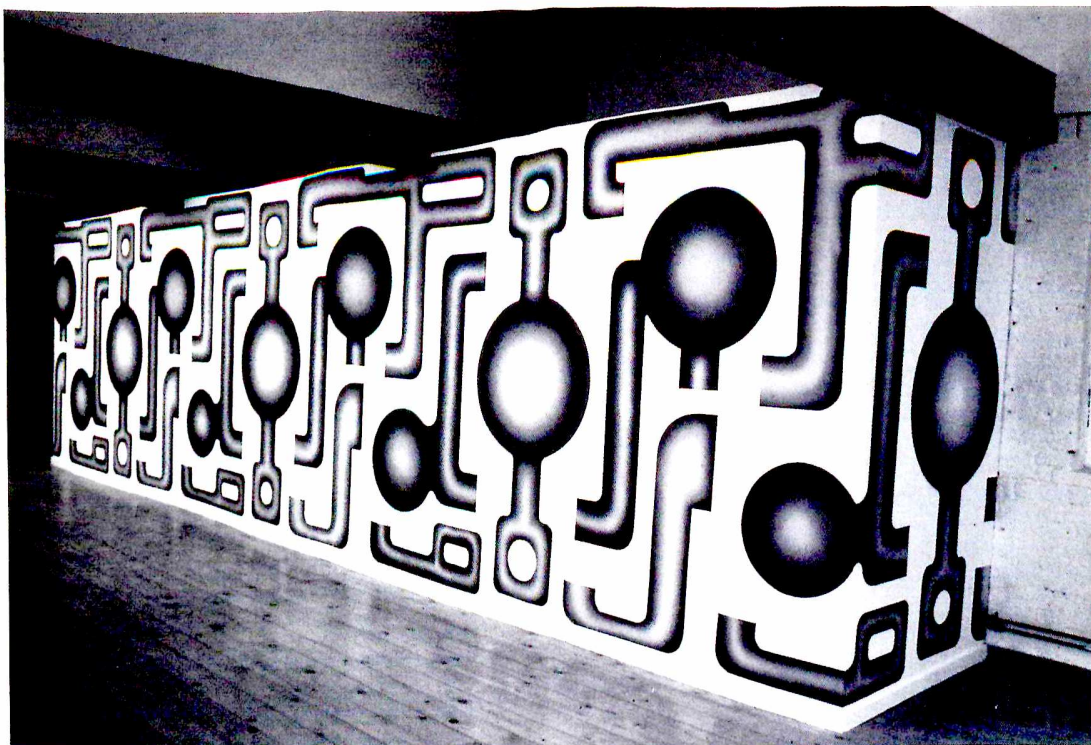
In that spirit, Ruppersberg's recent show in London, 'Honey, I Rearranged The Collection While You Were Gone', is impressively layered with meanings which casually span from his own artistic biography to the nature of art-collecting; from the inferred meaning behind casual, private messages to the habits within a longstanding relationship such as marriage. This is quite an achievement for a modest-sized exhibition such as this. Here Ruppersberg has cannibalised and re-presented a few of his old text-and-image works, among them *25 Pieces*, 1970 (included in Lucy Lippard's landmark publication *Six Years*) which combines newspaper clippings, uneventful ('boring') photographs and envelopes addressed to the artist; *Footnotes*, 1975, life-sized photographs of the library stacks at the Hollywood branch of the old Los Angeles public library, and *The Secret of Life of Death*, 1977, a Ruppersberg text set alongside images of nature books – ocean waves, deserts, foliage, etc. The show is by no means a retrospective, however, since all these early artworks have been 'updated' by being covered, as if pockmarked, by a swarm of yellow Post-it® Notes, all of which begin with variants on the show's title: 'Honey, I rearranged the collection while you were gone using artists who were popular in the 80s but aren't now and won't be later'; or 'Honey, I rearranged the collection while you were gone according to artists who complain and bitch and those who don't'; or 'Honey, I rearranged the collection while you were gone to try to change the ideas about art that the trustees have when they come over tonight', and on and on. Accompanying each modified work is a composition book filled with still more square yellow stickies (194, all together) bearing similar messages, suggesting Post-it® amusement no-end.



Allen Ruppersberg
'Honey, I Rearranged
The Collection While
You Were Gone' 1999
with *25 Pieces*
1970-1999

Mark Titchner

*The final times have
been and gone (II)* 1999



The work allegedly alludes to a real-life art-collecting couple who do indeed re-hang their collection based on wildly arbitrary, almost Borges-like non-systems of classification. The whole endeavour feels unmistakably American, prompting images of a sprawling home filled with discoloured photographs by obscure Conceptual artists and the unbearable canvases of vanished 80s painters; unlimited leisure time and patient housemaids trotting pictures back and forth from the living room to the three-car garage; the copious supply of stationery goods; the charmed dinners with museum directors and spoiled artists. Like the finest literature, 'Honey ...' evokes a whole lifestyle, with all the corresponding social trimmings, simply through the observation of a few stinging details. The tiny cruelties of a durable marriage ('Honey, I rearranged the collection while you were gone using pieces I like the best and pieces you hate the most'); the shared nostalgia ('Honey, I rearranged the collection to try to remember the days when I had the gallery and it was so exciting then') are conjured up with biting sadness.

After reading note after note, which vary from the silly to the poignant, the exhibition begins to feel – despite all its humour and self-irony – like a kind of graveyard, the Post-its' like so many tombstone epitaphs. Testaments to the suicide of Ruppertsberg's own art, buried under a heap of a rich couple's cross-purposes, stashed away in a suburban outback. ■

Gilda Williams is an art critic and commissioning editor for Phaidon Press.

Mark Titchner

Vilma Gold Gallery London June 4 to July 5

The title of Mark Titchner's wall painting, *The final times have been and gone (II)*, might be an appropriate epithet for his exhibition as a whole. It communicates a resignation about the ultimate failure of avant-garde idealism which informs everything he does. Titchner is happiest playing among the ruins, salvaging the depoliticised remains of aborted sedition for his own ends. He refuses to accept the death of an idea as necessarily its end, but is not too concerned with preserving the memory of its original context. The sources of his appropriations may be quite evident, but they are neither celebrated nor criticised within their own history. Rather, they are subsumed into the artist's project and transformed into metaphors for a perpetually interrupted journey to utopia. Whether this trip is motivated by cynicism, nostalgia, or a more disinterested, sociological stance is a moot point.

The works in this show reveal two distinct categories of inspiration. The first of these is the crossover between high art and modernist design characterised by Bauhaus-influenced geometric abstraction. The second is scientific experimentation since the 60s, from early computer design to the fringe areas of science. Titchner proposes a link between these two which is based on their aesthetic similarities, and the ways in which these have gradually assumed centre stage over

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