

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC
AND DANCE

ART IN AMERICA
January 1981

Jack Goldstein at The Kitchen

Jack Goldstein's "Sound Installation" included sights as well as sounds—five pairs of phonograph records on facing walls, and, on the connecting wall, an airbrushed rendering of two fighter jets zooming through the clouds. The sounds one heard were, of course, those of the records. The first pair presented a train in the distance, then an airplane in flight. The second pair was more closely linked: an ocean liner was heard first from inside its hull, next from across the water. This inside-outside logic became a process of addition in the third pair. A man was heard making cowboy whoops, then the whoops were joined by the sounds of a horse being ridden through a fast-moving stream. Goldstein's penchant for the arbitrary was accompanied here by his taste for the artificial—the "stream" sounded very much like a running tap. The next pair of records presented a woman sobbing in a determined manner, then little girls giggling. Lastly, an airplane taxiing over a runway was followed by the sound of bombs whistling through air.

Goldstein presented plenty of structural clues to the meaning of all this, but none of them led very far or even consented to make themselves clear. The fourth pair of records may have presented sobbing performer and giggling audience, or it may not have. Yet surely the work turned theatrical at some point—with the movie-soundtrack feel of the "cowboy" records, perhaps.

Certainly the painting of the fighter jets told little about the recordings of airplane sounds. This installation left one stranded somewhere in a field of disconnected parallels, mirrorings and variants. Each reference insisted on the possibility of order, while refusing to establish it at any point in the infinitely vast, almost completely dark zone of the imagination in which Goldstein's images immersed the listener-viewer.

The "light" of these images, visual and aural, is intense but it doesn't radiate. Each fragmentary meaning glows like a filament, self-powered but on the verge of snuffing itself out. The work inspires one to devise narrative lines which dissolve almost before they begin. The mind lets this happen willingly, for Goldstein has designed his fragments to mock the hope of coherence. Like Thomas Lawson, David Salle and a few other young painters, Goldstein evokes the breakdown of the systems that, until very recently, gave at least the *feel* of order to our experience of art and perhaps even of life. He is an artist of structural ruin, hence there is a bitter edge to his art. It has a tough optimism as well. This installation was so cunningly disordered it made Dada and Surrealism look as accessible as Andy Warhol, yet it made one clear point.

There was a narrative here because the viewer-listener willed it. However this story line was not drawn from Goldstein's stock of images. It was drawn instead from the viewer's mind itself, which the artist turned into a metonymy machine, a synecdoche circuit, to demonstrate that parts *must*

become wholes, even if wholeness resides exclusively in the will to make sense of experience. One came face to face with that will to meaning in the darkness of Goldstein's work. This installation presented an awesomely dramatic moment. [Jack Goldstein is showing at Metro Pictures, New York, until Jan. 7.] —Carter Ratcliff

Board of Directors

Robert Ashley
Paula Cooper
Suzanne Delehanty
Philip Glass
Eric Larrabee
Barbara London
Mary MacArthur
Meredith Monk
Barbara Pine
Carlota Schoolman
Robert Stearns
John Stewart
Caroline Thorne
Paul Walter

HALEAKALA, INC.
59 WOOSTER
NEW YORK,
NEW YORK
10012
(212) 925-3615