

MUSEUM OF ART/WSU



October 7 - November 16, 1997

Northwest Focus

PETLAND

An installation by Kathryn Glowen

When Life Becomes Art

By some accounts, installation art is as old as the cave paintings at Lascaux, but its elaboration as an identifiable art form had to await the 1960s evolution of Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptualism and late twentieth-century Postmodernism. Perhaps its most central defining feature is the way installation crosses the great ART-LIFE divide.

For at least two centuries a keen debate has raged between those artists and critics who argue for “art-for-art’s sake” and others who argue that art must be connected to life. When art does not intersect life, when it exists in its own arcane world, it can be dry and empty, though still retaining formal beauty. But when art thoroughly and radically intersects life, whole new worlds open up . . . worlds where people are born, where they live their ambitions and aspirations, and where they die. Through art, we may come to know more of those personal worlds, and we may come to know about ourselves, as beings that are connected with all of life in an intricate web. Like spiders, we weave our webs, but we can never attain a standpoint outside of our experience to see what we have spun.

Kathryn Glowen’s *PETLAND* accomplishes this unusual feat for Mamie L. Rand. Rand (1894-1995) worked as an accountant and amateur musician; she raised show animals, including chickens and goats. And, more pertinent to this exhibition, she was the chief proprietor of Petland, a pet shop she owned for thirty years in Spokane, Washington. Glowen met Ms. Rand through her husband’s aunt, Esther Kline, who was Rand’s neighbor, care provider, and guardian. During several visits with Rand before she died, Glowen obtained permission to create an installation environment with Rand’s personal and professional possessions.

PETLAND consists of the ephemera of a life; it is a remarkable collection and an even more remarkable invention. The installation represents an aesthetic finalization of Rand’s life. Although we may say that both art and life are ultimately open-ended—that they are “unfinalizable,” to use philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s term—there is another sense in which each person’s life is finalized in death.¹ Nevertheless, that person’s work can live on through others. While this is obviously true in the artistic domains of culture, where an artist’s or poet’s or dancer’s legacy may be extended and developed by others who follow, it is seldom true of the lives of the less famous. Maybe every life is

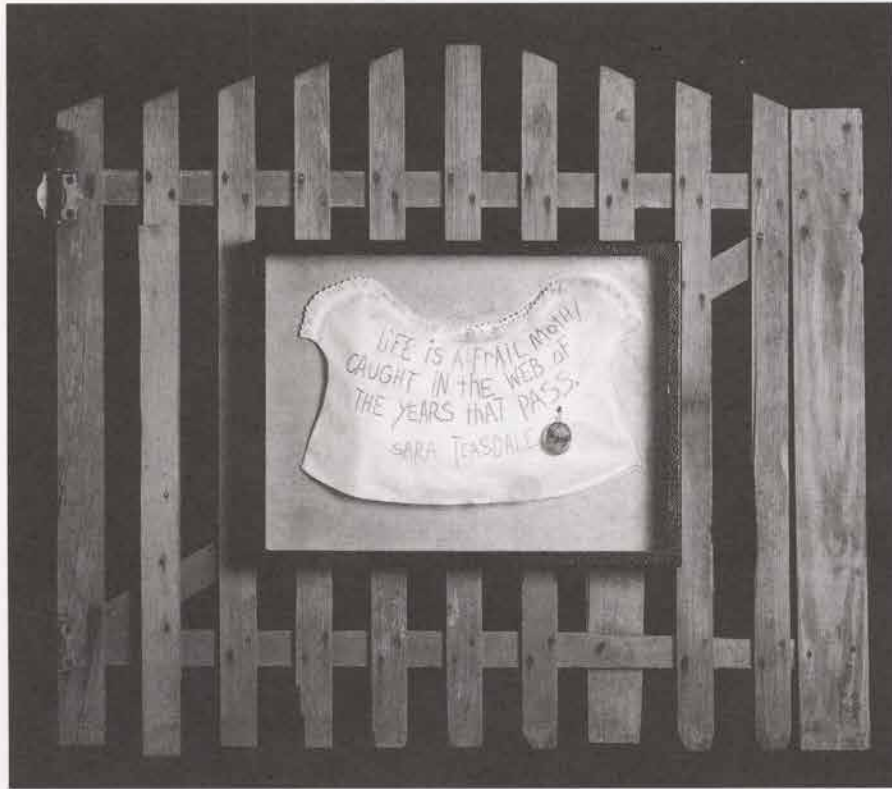
chaotic until one attempts to bring order to it. That urge may be internal, although certainly many people do not even begin the process. Some of us carry a proclivity toward introspection and meaning-making, while a lucky few may be commemorated by others.

Art has always served a variety of functions—as entertainment, as personal expression, as cultural criticism. But Glowen’s installation, like monuments of all kinds, is about commemoration, and it raises many questions about our traditional understanding of what constitutes a monument. Especially, what does it mean to be an artist? Just what is being commemorated here? Where does the one woman’s life end and the artist’s aesthetic refinement of that life begin? The viewer must decide.

As is true of much contemporary conceptual art, from works by Ed and Nancy Kienholz to Group Material, the viewer’s relationship to *PETLAND* is crucial. While the artist’s working process is one of reduction, clarification, and self-conscious reaccentuation, the viewer must try to elaborate, to expand her or his world view in order to piece together a woman’s identity: her life, her values, her interests, her faith, her love of animals, her interest in physical culture, her efforts to keep herself in business. In *Dress of Years*, Mamie’s years are marked with 101 butterfly tags, each of which is pinned to her christening dress, and offset by the photographs and mirror in which the viewer sees both Mamie and her- or himself. Related to the medieval Book of Hours, popular prayer books in which separate parts of the day are designated by specific readings and images, this piece quite literally marks time. Many of the individual pieces in *PETLAND* implicitly ask us, what implications does *this* life have for us? What can we learn about commitment, endurance, and love?

By contrast, *Knick-Knack Handkerchief* is less personal, but aesthetically just as powerful. The piece consists of 69 small shelves, each of which juxtaposes three or five exquisite handstitched or embroidered handkerchiefs with small animal figurines that Mamie had collected. The viewer must look at these old objects in new ways, reevaluating the role things have in our lives. This work, as well as others such as the *Worried Pup* dress hangers and *Nippy-Creamy-Sharp-Mild*, asks us to reflect about our own materialism and consumer greed.

The question of what happens to us when we die has many dimensions. What happens to the body? What



Traveler, 1997

happens to the spirit, that vital life energy that makes the eyes sparkle and the limbs move? What happens to all of the accoutrements of a life, the stuff we have accumulated, especially if we are collectors, as many Americans are? Piles of fabric, pillows, cages, aprons, stools, a bed, animal feed . . . everywhere the detritus of a life. But here all that *stuff* has been recycled, so that "making do" becomes "making art," to paraphrase the title of Verni Greenfield's book.²

In fact, *PETLAND* is about recycling, memory, and time. Mamie Rand, like many Americans, had no direct heirs. How is it possible to keep the dignity of her memory? All of us exist in particular chronotopes, specific juxtapositions of time and space. In the installation Glowen uses a variety of material artifacts—photographs, letters, magazines collected by Rand—to help the viewer enter into Rand's unique time and place. But if the installation stopped there, it would be disappointing. By its persistent collaging of often disparate elements, Glowen successfully evokes multiple narratives, thus allowing *PETLAND* to function as both a window into one woman's life and a panorama that encompasses heterogeneous life possibilities.

Both life and art have limitations—points of entry and boundaries that define their perimeters and

parameters. How can we enter into this life or that art, making sense of it within the larger web of existence? Nowhere is this question posed more poignantly than in *Traveler*, a mixed media assemblage. "Life is a frail moth, caught in the web of the years that pass." So reads the quotation by Sara Teasdale that is embroidered onto a baby's dress and pinned with a moth tag. The dress is encased in a box, which is attached to an old gate. *Traveler* is a metaphor for Glowen's installation as a whole. Through it, *PETLAND* speaks to us: "Keep out!" "Come in!" "Stop and watch the spider's insistent spinning."

—Deborah Haynes
Pullman

¹ See Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 13, 16, 25, *passim*.

² Verni Greenfield, *Making Do or Making Art, A Study in American Recycling* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986).

Exhibition

PETLAND is an art installation by Kathryn Glowen. It utilizes personal effects, household items, ephemera, and other materials belonging to Mamie L. Rand (1894-1995) of Spokane, Washington. It includes other objects found or made by the artist. Created from 1995 through 1997, the installation was seen at the WSU Museum of Art, October 7 to November 16, 1997.

Biography

- 1941 Born Seattle, Washington, August 29
- 1959-60 Attended Washington State University, Pullman
- 1960-62 Attended University of Tulsa, Oklahoma
- 1978 Moved to 10-acre farm, Arlington, Washington
- 1991 Retired from Boeing to devote full time to art
- 1994, 95 Guest instructor in sculpture, Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 1983, 91 Gallery II, Washington State University, Pullman
- 1984 Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington
- 1985 Pacific Arts Center, Seattle
- 1986 Skagit Valley College Foundation Gallery, Mt. Vernon, Washington
- 1987 Matter-Danz Gallery, Bellingham, Washington
- 1988 Art Center Gallery, Seattle Pacific University
- 1989 Eastern Washington University Art Gallery, Cheney
- 1990, 92, 94 MIA Gallery, Seattle
- 1992 Michael Himovitz Gallery, Sacramento
- 1995, 97 Seattle Art Museum Rental/Sales Gallery Streetspace
- 1996 Kirkland Arts Center, Kirkland, Washington
Art and Soul Gallery, Ketchum, Idaho

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1981 *The Farm Project*, environmental siteworks, Arlington, Washington
- 1983 *Reno-Seattle Exchange*, Sheppard Art Gallery, University of Nevada at Reno and Art Center Gallery, Seattle Pacific University
- 1984 *Country of Origin: USA*, Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. (traveled in South America)
Images of Eclectic Energy: A National Invitational, Cheney Cowles Museum, Spokane, Washington
Women Artists Invitational, Spokane Falls Community College Gallery, Washington
- 1985 *In (2) Parts: Seeing Double*, Bumbershoot Arts Festival, Seattle
Primal Plastic Pool, Missoula Art Center, Montana
Northwest International, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington (also 1986)
OK-USA National Sculpture Exhibition, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma
- 1986 *Beyond the Real*, Prichard Gallery, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho
- 1987 *Just for Fun*, Liberty Gallery, Liberty National Bank, Louisville, Kentucky
Contemporary Masks: Facing the World, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington

- 1988 *Northwest Annual Exhibition*, Tacoma Art Museum, Washington
- 1989 Reese Bullen Gallery, Humboldt State University, Arcata, California
Not Vegetable, Not Mineral, Port Angeles Fine Arts Center, Washington
- 1990 *Summer Arts*, California State University at Long Beach
Three Universes in the Atomic Café, IDEA Gallery, Sacramento
Art Works for AIDS, Seattle Center Pavilion
Northwest Annual, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle
Northwest Designer Craftsmen, Bellevue Art Museum, Washington
- 1991 *Celebrations and Ceremonies*, Security Pacific Gallery, Seattle
View from the Edge, Index Gallery, Clark College, Vancouver, Washington
Invitational: 100, Fine Art Center, Anacortes, Washington
- 1992 *Art Discussing Life*, Prichard Art Gallery, University of Idaho, Moscow; Paris Gibson Square Art Center, Great Falls, Montana; Brigham Young University Art Gallery, Provo, Utah
Some Seattle "Materielists," International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage
- 1993 *Washington: Voices in Contemporary Sculpture*, Bellevue Art Museum, Washington
Contemporary Icons, Bush Barn Art Center, Salem, Oregon
39th Annual International Juried Exhibition, San Diego Art Institute
- 1994 *A World of Maps*, Anchorage Museum of History and Art
Containing the Earth, Contemporary Craft Gallery, Portland, Oregon and PANACA Gallery, Bellevue, Washington
Pacific Northwest Annual, Bellevue Art Museum, Washington (also 1996)
- 1995 *Kunstkabinett*, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle
Folie à Deux, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle
The Land, Tacoma Art Museum, Washington
Ex Libris: Book Art, Fisher Gallery, Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle
Mystery of the Magic Box, Anchorage Museum of History and Art
In the Box, D.O.T. Gallery, Portland, Oregon

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Anchorage Museum of History and Art
- Evergreen Hospice Care Center, Kirkland, Washington
- Seattle Arts Commission
- Washington State Arts Commission
- United Way of King County, Seattle



Baby Bird Bassinet, 1997

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PERIODICALS

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- Conroy, Sarah Booth. "Rugs to Riches: Art That Works for a Living." *The Washington Post*, March 8, 1984.
- Demetre, Jim. "Kunstkabinett Comes to Dinner." *Reflex Magazine*, August/September, 1995.
- Gillis, Sydney. "Lost and Found Objects." *Eastside Week*, October 23, 1996.
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- Szymanski, Jerry. "Visit Whatcom Museum Exhibits for a Visual Trip." *Bellingham Herald*, February 10, 1984.
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