

**MATERIAL
MATTERS**

ART IN THE ANCHORAGE

MATERIAL MATTERS

A PROJECT BY HOPE SANDROW

COMMISSIONED BY CREATIVE TIME

SUMMER 1995

For the past twenty-two years, Creative Time has been dedicated to bringing artists' voices to unlikely and even abandoned public spaces. A prime example is the massive vaulted chambers of the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage, a site which was transformed from municipal storage space into a premiere exhibition locale more than thirteen years ago. Our annual *Art in the Anchorage* exhibition thus has provided an appropriate context for the creation of MATERIAL MATTERS, a large scale installation exploring the roles which artists play in the transformation and revitalization of neighborhoods.

Artists have often ventured into neglected, even notorious neighborhoods, to turn rundown spaces into studios and homes. They have taken very real risks, invested countless hours of labor and dollars to improve their environments and, through their hard work, they have enhanced their neighborhoods. As a result, thousands of artists have been rewarded with costly lawsuits and the menacing threat of eviction. In response to this phenomena, MATERIAL MATTERS offers a poignant and thoughtful reflection on how displacement profoundly effects individual lives and cultural production.

Anne Pasternak, Executive Director, Creative Time

**TERRY ADKINS
JANE DICKSON
ROBIN KAHN
SUSAN LEOPOLD
CHRISTIAN MARCLAY
MATTHEW MCCASLIN
SARA PASTI & NEIGHBORS
HOPE SANDROW
GLEN SEATOR
JOHN YAU**

MATERIAL MATTERS takes inspiration from the Anchorage's vast and vaulted space. Once used as municipal storage, the surrounding area is where cardboard boxes were first manufactured. The art works consist of boxes of materials metaphorically revealing the relationship of our art to contemporary life. Through arrangements and contents, issues such as marginalization, displacement and reconstruction are refigured.

Most of the artists in this project are engaged in legal battles to remain in our lofts/studios or have been forced to move out. This is because artists often need to work in neglected buildings, where such presence revitalizes the area. Yet we (and others such as the cardboard box manufacturers) are often forced out as a result of gentrification.

I envisioned this project and installation to be representative of artists' critical issues. The many stacks of boxes viewed as our collective vision portray the transient nature of art and life. Looking at each art work reinforces individuality: how we incorporate our art making into the construct of the box exhibits the richness of our working together. I wish to thank all of the people who have come together to make this project possible.

Hope Sandrow



Material Matters

©1995. Installation view, Art in the Anchorage.
Mixed Media, cardboard boxes.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

The Brooklyn Anchorage consists of huge cathedral-like spaces located inside the granite and brick base of the Brooklyn Bridge. An architectural wonder, the bridge inspired many early modernist artists and writers, among them the painter Joseph Stella, and the poets Hart Crane and Vladimir Mayakovsky. In the 1920's, before the Depression and before moving to Europe, the Brooklyn born Henry Miller loved walking across the bridge. In the late 1950's, after Charlie Parker died, Sonny Rollins played his saxophone on the bridge night after night, and titled the breakthrough album that came out of these nightly sessions, *The Bridge*.

At the same time, the demographics of the area around the base of the Brooklyn Bridge has changed considerably from the days when the waterfront housed factories which manufactured, among other things, corrugated boxes and munitions, to the 1970s, when the Print Center published hundreds of small press books and little magazines devoted largely to poetry, and many artists began moving into the run-

down factory buildings, empty warehouses, and closed sweat shops. Instead of focusing on the Brooklyn Bridge, Hope Sandrow, the curator of MATERIAL MATTERS and one of the artists who has work in the exhibition, invited a number of artists living in the area to make work using cardboard boxes, something which had once been manufactured in abundance. By suggesting that cardboard boxes be one of the primary materials in whatever the artists made, Sandrow knowingly evoked the possibility that the piece could address the artist's position in society, that artists were both discardable and good for transmitting something, and that art and life are inextricably linked.

Always looking for large spaces in which they can live and/or work, artists have become the unwitting antennae for those involved in real estate speculation, as well as those who want spacious rooms with high ceilings. Typically, they move into perilous situations, make the area into a fashionable neighborhood, and then are forced to move out. It is a recurring pattern in New York which shows no sign of abating. By making a previously uninhabited area or a blighted urban neighborhood habitable, by literally moving in and fixing it up, artists have reclaimed Soho, Tribeca, and the Brooklyn Waterfront, making the first



two areas into some of the most fashionable and desirable real estate in all New York. Reclaimed equals recycled, which is ironic because at least one building on the Brooklyn Waterfront is a paper recycling plant. While the artists reclaim neighborhoods, they themselves are often pushed aside for those who can pay more rent, offer more money.

For the most part, the artists in the exhibition, **MATERIAL MATTERS**, have made work which addresses the various issues raised by living and working in commercial spaces and interim multiple dwellings in New York. A number of the artists in the exhibition — among them, Susan Leopold and Christian Marclay — have been evicted from their lofts or studios. Others, like Jane Dickson, found it necessary for her and her family's peace of mind to move out of Times Square. And still others persist, going to court in an attempt to change the zoning of their building or to fight the landlord. It is all part of being an artist and living and working in New York, the way living in Brooklyn and working in Manhattan requires you to use public transportation.

By initiating the cycle of urban reclamation that often casts them aside, they have been directly involved with both replacement and dis-

placement. Within a society predicated on both replacing people and displacing them, artists are in a position to be acutely aware of, as well as sensitive to, society's commerce-minded treatment of its citizens.

Christian Marclay's *My Weight in Records*, 1995, is both exactly that and a documentation of his being evicted from his studio in Times Square. One's life includes one's things. If art excludes life, it tends to become elitist and academic. Among other things, *My Weight in Records* reminds the viewer that art should not be confined to a purely aesthetic experience, that one's understanding of art should spill over into one's understanding of life.

Untitled Work in Progress (1991-) Sweeping Project #5 is an ongoing project in which Glenn Seator sweeps the detritus that has collected into piles. One can see in Seator's ritual of gathering both literal and metaphorical evidence of the fact that society is caught in a cycle of consumption and waste, and that this cycle extends beyond material matters into the realm of human affairs. By proposing that he is both an artist and a maintenance worker, Seator reveals our practice of separating workers (artists, maintenance workers, housewives) into separate piles, and assigning each pile a particular monetary and





social value.

In *Sentry*, Jane Dickson uses synthetic pile doormats, something we ordinarily walk on and over, as the grounds on which she paints. Instead of crossing over them into another environment, another world, the viewer must now stop and contemplate their transformation into paintings.

The use of phonograph records, dust and detritus, doormats by these artists, and the use of cardboard boxes by other artists in the exhibition, including Terry Adkins, Robin Kahn, Susan Leopold, Mathew McCaslin, Sara Pasti and her neighbors, and Hope Sandrow, get to an issue raging at the heart of contemporary America. What do we keep? And what do we throw away? What is the difference between useful and useless? Working with other artists in her building, Sara Pasti puts familiar domestic objects such as chairs in open cardboard boxes; they are about to be either packed or unpacked. The viewer senses that being an urban dweller means being a nomad, that one must be ready to move at a moment's notice.

In a number of the works, there is an interplay between that

which is seemingly permanent and that which is transitory. The house becomes the things in it, that which can be picked up and taken. One's home is no longer one's castle. Or, if it is a castle, then it must be fully protected. The use of surveillance monitors is central to Susan Leopold's *Imminently Perilous*. Do we use cameras to guard the perimeters of our home? And if we do, who is watching who?

What about objects considered disposable or consumable? Terry Adkin's *Sweat* includes natural incense, synthetic pearls, quilting pins, and a carrying case - things America imports from China, which was once the source for tea and spices. The relationship between nations is largely determined by need, by what each has to offer the other. Cheap labor is available in China and in Chinatown: sweat shops are both there and here. *Sweat* underscores our own complicity in this state of affairs.

In *Nature Monochrome IX*, Hope Sandrow erects a column out of cardboard boxes, thus subverting the modernist ideal associated with Brancusi's *Endless Column*. Instead of rising majestically toward the sky, Sandrow's column rises precariously out of a haphazard pile of boxes, many of them open. In the open boxes the viewer sees large



photographic images of a hand. The emulsion (or skin) has been peeled off. The artist doesn't simply make images. Rather, as *Nature Monochrome IX* suggests, the artist both constructs and peels away; the process of artistic creation is dualistic. The ground we build on is equally precarious. The toppled boxes remind us that we, as viewers, can intervene and destroy art. However, while Sandrow's peeled photographs remind us that the process of creation includes an element of destruction, the toppled boxes serve to remind us that acts of intolerance and aggression produce only ruins.

The new television, radio, personal computer, or washer and dryer we may want or need come in boxes. The ones we have will become obsolete, so we are told daily in one form or another, and will need to be carted away. There are countries in South America, particularly Venezuela, where cardboard boxes are considered a valuable commodity - they can be used by those living in the barrios dotting the hills surrounding the city. City ordinances ban the leaving of cardboard on the street. If you're sneaky and leave some on the street, they will soon be gone. The one who finds a pile of flattened, corrugated cardboard

knows it's a lucky day.

Best known in America for the movie based on his novel, *Woman of the Dunes*, Kobo Abe wrote another novel about confinement, *The Box Man*. In an area once known for manufacturing corrugated boxes, the Brooklyn Waterfront has become in recent years the home for a number of people living on the streets. One of them is a man who sits in a chair inside an immense metal box that was once used by a trucking company to haul different products across America. His domicile is bigger than many apartments in Manhattan. I doubt if any one of us would trade places with him. The ironies are no longer ironic. Art, Abe's novel makes clear, isn't separate from life; they mirror each other in ways we may not want to recognize, because in doing so we may have to come to recognize ourselves and our part in society's cycle of waste and consumption. The artists in MATERIAL MATTERS hold up mirrors to themselves and us. Mirrors which cut through many of our cherished, comforting illusions. Begin looking and do not stop until you see what is before your very eyes.

John Yau



Material Matters

©1995. Installation view, Art in the Anchorage.

Mixed Media, cardboard boxes.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.



Terry Adkins
Sweat

©1995. *Material Matters*. Natural incense, synthetic pearls, quilting pins, carrying case, cardboard box. 16" x 58" x 11".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

Sweat is a parable on the historic and contemporary relationship between the displacement of races and the exploitation of cheap labor. The presence of Africans in the Americas, of Chinese in Panama, of Indonesians in Madagascar, as well as the weekday exodus of Mexicans from sweat shops beneath the bridges along the Brooklyn waterfront bear witness to this enduring phenomenon.

Natural incense, synthetic pearls (both exports of China), 450 quilting pins and a carrying case are combined to illustrate respectively the olfactory, resourceful, repetitive and migratory atmospheres which pervade the living and working environments of displaced peoples.

Terry Adkins

I lived and or worked in Times Square, from 1978 to 1993. Our loft was already condemned, pending Times Square Redevelopment, when we moved in. That was why we could afford it. After endless sagas of crime, chaos, landlord negligence, and harassment, which inspired my work but threatened my growing family's health and safety, we chose to move out.

As I made *SENTRY*, I was thinking about the complexities of that experience; how far "home" extends beyond the limits of our skin, how the compartmentalizing aspects of "home" and the ambivalent desires for both protection and escape shape me. And how fundamental the need for shelter is, and how automatic the impulse to fight for it is no matter how meager its assets may be.

Out of stripper paintings, I moved to painting figures on industrial carpeting, considering what traces we leave behind the places we have lived. I want to use these very ordinary carpets as modern Shrouds of Turin, letting ghosts emerge on them of the people who had passed through their rooms, as if I were dusting for fingerprints.

Jane Dickson



Jane Dickson

Sentry

©1995. *Material Matters*. Oil paint on synthetic pile doormats,
cardboard boxes, wood, fluorescent lights. 144" x 32" x 24".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.



Robin Kahn
Comfort Zone

©1995. *Material Matters*. Chairs, embroidery on burlap,
cardboard boxes, 34" x 78" x 26".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

comfort zone

Come sit next to me and put your hand on my lap,
I'll stroke your hair and sing to you
when you were a
baby.

Close your eyes and crawl into quiet,
inside where it is dark and warm.
Float along in my embrace until you awake,
and then shake me off and step out.
Step out with strong strides
with the reassurance that I remain here
keeping these moments private and safe.
Come sit next to me here,
until you are ready
to walk on.

Robin Kahn

Imminently Perilous is a portrait of the loft I lived and worked in along the Brooklyn waterfront for over twelve years. My work has been directly influenced by this environment, revealing personal history through architectural vignettes. I wanted this installation to tap into the emotional and psychological associations attached to this place. On July 19th, 1993, I was served a 6 hour vacate order issued by the NYC Fire Department. This threw me into a state of frenzy - the stability of my home and studio was abruptly shattered by being condemned as 'IMMINENTLY PERILOUS'.

The city has not developed a policy for artists to live where they work and the loft board has been ambivalent to make any decisions which might facilitate the situation. Two years later my loft remains dormant. The "rabbit warren" effect of the factory which had been an inspiration for much of my work is the reason my studio loft continues to be under surveillance. The combination of sculpture, painting and surveillance equipment creates the illusion of an actual space under surveillance. The piece establishes perceptual impressions which can be seen as the echoes of memories evoked by this urban setting.

Susan Leopold



Susan Leopold
Imminently Perilous

©1995. *Material Matters*. Mixed media, wood, surveillance equipment, mirrors, cardboard boxes. 8' x 12' x 10'.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.



Christian Marclay

My Weight in Records, 1995

©1995. *Material Matters*. Phonograph records
in cardboard boxes. 13" x 43" x 15".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

My Weight in Records

As a result of New York State's plan to redevelop Times Square and make room for a hotel, two dozen artists are being evicted. We have lost our legal battle against the State and must move out.

For twenty years the building that houses our studios at 233 West 42nd Street has nurtured the talents of scores of artists. Often artists rent inexpensive spaces in blighted urban areas unwittingly serving the real estate interests by improving these neighborhoods and prompting gentrification. In the case of 42nd Street, other artists were called in and sponsored by the Urban Development Corporation to create temporary artworks, in order to clean up the seedy image of the block and attract high profile "respectable" tenants, such as the Disney Corporation.

Now that they have succeeded the artists are dispensable.

Christian Marclay

Living in the shadow of the Bridge, sleeping with the pulse of the car traffic in my subconscious. Living at the base of the cloverleaf, of the 8th Wonder of the World. Traffic backed up all the way to Chambers Street.

I have never been able to separate my awareness of the bridge and the constant flow of cars.

The viewer of this piece (as with all people coming to the Anchorage) will quickly understand this installation *Intersection*.

Matthew McCaslin



Matthew McCaslin

Intersection

©1995. *Material Matters*. Televisions, VCR player,
cardboard boxes & related electrical materials.
45" x 46" x 23".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.



Sara Pasti

195 - 201 Front Street:

An Interim Multiple Dwelling of the Mind

with works by Mariella Bisson, Emily Feinstein, Carl Lawrence Gable, Andrea Gardner, William Nogosek & Nina Talbot.

1995. *Material Matters*. Mixed Media. 12' x 9' x 13'.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

"Interim Multiple Dwelling" is a term used by NYC's Loft Law to describe commercial buildings that have been residentially occupied by three or more families since April 1, 1980. 195-201 Front Street - located in Brooklyn six blocks from the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage - is one such building.

Life in IMD #B30008 is a mixed blessing. We have large open spaces to make art and virtually unlimited parking at night, AND exorbitantly high commercial electric rates and no heat on winter evenings and weekends. Then there are the pleasures and difficulties of living with other families - the communal washer and dryer, the neighbors who watch out for your safety and pitch in when help is needed, the birthday parties and other celebrations, disagreements over shared bills and responsibilities, and the ongoing court appearances, attorney's fees, and building meetings involved in protecting our legal right to live where we do.

195-201 Front Street: An Interim Multiple Dwelling of the Mind is an expression of our experience making a home in an inhospitable urban environment.

Sarah Pasti

On May 28th, 1995, people broke into the Anchorage's chambers, trampling and ruining my art work. I reconsidered the conceptual context of this piece as the crowds' destructive force could not be ignored. Believing that art and life are linked, I reconstructed this installation from those ruins, and again, after five images of the hand were taken.

Nature Monochrome IX: Reconstruction uses fragmentation to explore the relationship between self and history. Taking apart and exposing innermost beliefs relates to my process of peeling the emulsion layer of a silver print from it's support into fragments. Larger than life images of the hand are meant to represent being, whereas the Columns of cardboard boxes refer to the Modernist ideal of linking art making with spirituality.

In May 1988, my work in two exhibitions was ruined by picture frames made by Bark Frameworks and legal problems with my loft arose that I'm still dealing with today. Two of the Bark pieces, one titled "The fatefulness that lies on all things", have been incorporated into this installation as a symbol of the link between the loss of my art work and my loft. The toppled columns recollect memories of intolerance, indifference and aggression.

Hope Sandrow



Hope Sandrow

Nature Monochrome IX : Reconstruction

©1995. *Material Matters*. Silver print fragments, papyrus paper, twine, framed photographs, cardboard boxes. 15' x 10' x 10'.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

Untitled Work in Progress (1991-) Sweeping Project #5

For the duration of this exhibition, I will alter the Anchorage's usual maintenance program:

In conventional fashion, commercial sweeping compound (a damp mixture of sawdust, detergent and dyes which bonds to dust and dirt) will be sprinkled over the entire floor and swept into piles. Instead of being immediately picked up and jettisoned from the space, the Sweepings - evidence of ongoing labors - will be left and will continue to accumulate until the show closes.

Glen Seator

F R A G I L E

A G I L E

A G E

R A G

R A G E

R I L E

F I L E

F A I L

F R A I L

A I L

A L E

R A I L

John Yau



Glen Seator
Untitled Work in Progress (1991 -)
Sweeping Project #5

©1995. *Material Matters*. Commercial sweeping compound,
cardboard boxes, Anchorage exhibition refuse.



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

John Yau

Fragile

©1995. *Material Matters*. Poem burned
on cardboard boxes. 22" x 25" x 2".



Material Matters was created by Hope Sandrow for
Creative Time's 1995 Art in the Anchorage.

MATERIAL MATTERS Exhibition Checklist

Terry Adkins *Sweat*

16" x 58" x 11". 1995. Natural incense, synthetic pearls, quilting pins, carrying case, cardboard box.

Jane Dickson *Sentry*

144" X 32" X 24". 1995. Oil paint on synthetic pile doormats, cardboard boxes, wood, fluorescent lights.

Robin Kahn *Comfort Zones*

1995. Four chairs, a bench, embroidery on burlap, cardboard boxes.

Susan Leopold *Imminently Perilous*

8' x 12' x 10'. 1995. Mixed Media, wood, surveillance equipment, mirrors, cardboard boxes.

Christian Marclay *My Weight in Records 1995*
13" x 43" x 15". 1995. Phonograph Records in boxes.

Matthew McCaslin *Intersection*
45" x 46" x 23". 1995. Televisions, player, boxes & related electrical materials.

Sarah Pasti *195-201 Front Str.: An Interim Multiple Dwelling of the Mind*
12' x 9' x 13'. 1995. Multi media installation, cardboard boxes.

Hope Sandrow *Nature Monochrome IX: Reconstruction*
15' x 10' x 10'. 1995. Silver print fragments, papyrus paper, twine, boxes.

Glen Seator *Untitled Work in Progress (1991 -) Sweeping Project #5*
1995. Commercial sweeping compound, Anchorage exhibition refuse.

John Yau *Fragile*
22" x 25" x 2". 1995. Poem burned onto boxes.

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Without an exhibition or performance space of its own, CREATIVE TIME sponsors artists in the creation of new works that expand the definition of "public art". Since 1973, CREATIVE TIME has presented thousands of artists whose works cross disciplines, discover uncommon venues, rescue neglected sites, participate in unusual collaborations, investigate cultural influences, confront social issues, and encourage public dialogue. These artists redefine "public art" as they cultivate new public spaces -- in plazas, lobbies, taverns, train stations, a ferry terminal and vacant buildings; on beaches, piers, street corners, video screens, television, and cyberspace. Public art, as presented by CREATIVE TIME, challenges both the chronic isolation of artists and the widespread notion that "ART" is an elitist pastime, and opens the way to greater appreciation for the inalienable right to free creative expression.



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