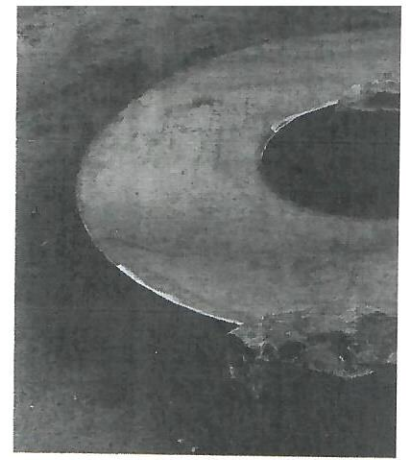




Leonard Koscianski, *Behind the House*, 1982, oil on canvas, 50 x 64".



William T. Wiley, *Slant Step Becomes Rhino/Rhino Becomes Slant Step*, 1966, plaster, acrylic, paint, and chain, 22 x 12 x 12".



Jean Clareboudt, *Elevation 9*, 1981, steel and broken st

progenitors of "dude-ranch dada." And with its innate equivocality, it didn't even have to be turned upside down to convolute its meaning and reiterate Duchamp's stance that anything can be taken out of context and become a work of art if the artist says so.

The well-documented "Slant Step Saga" accompanying this exhibition opens with William T. Wiley noticing the thing in a secondhand shop in Mill Valley, Marin County, in 1965. He returned to see it with Bruce Nauman, who later suggested Wiley buy it. He did so, paying only 50¢ because no one could determine its value. The first of several trips along Bay Area, Sacramento, and New York axes, the object being passed from artist to artist, began with Nauman taking it to his studio at the University of California, Davis, where he was an MFA student. Initially used as a footstool when leaning back in a chair, during the spring of 1966 it was a model for a film by Nauman and William Allan (never completed) on building a new slant step. It was also the subject of a Nauman construction, *Modernized Slant Step*, serving as an appealing model for a conceptual design problem because its shape appeared arbitrary or invented despite its superficially useful appearance.

Later in 1966 the slant step was chosen by a loose consensus of artists as the theme of an exhibition at the collective Berkeley Gallery, then located in San Francisco. Wiley had suggested the object for their focus; others participating included William Witherup, William Allan, William Geis, Jim Melchert, Robert Hudson, and Jack Fulton, in addition to 15 others. The sculptural interpretations ranged in materials from

bread dough to Hudson and Geis' inflated, transparent-plastic step. Many were ephemeral in nature and were given away as raffle prizes at the close of the show.

Seventeen years later "Slant Step Revisited" displays 59 ways to produce a slant step, presumably gathering all extant versions from the 1966 and subsequent 1970 "Slant Step Show" at the Art Co. gallery in Sacramento, which added work by Robert Arneson, Steve Kaltenbach, Ray Johnson, Michael Stevens, and several others. "Revisited"'s sculptural variations and graphic responses include works in lead, ceramic, plaster, wood, and molded plastic, as well as drawings, watercolors, photographs, a poem, a chant, and photo documentation of the earlier shows. Few of these are memorable as self-sufficient works of art, but many are revealing as period pieces and examples of particular individuals' concerns at the time. Among the noteworthy are William Allan's series of six watercolors from 1966 showing the step gradually sinking into the sea, the green of the step simultaneously fading to merge with the blue moiré background; Steve Kaltenbach's streamlined, high-tech *slantstep 2*, 1969, fabricated in fiberglass by industrial designers at his suggestion of the concept; and Robert Arneson's *Blueprint for a Slant Step*, 1967, a typically punning footprint in blue ceramic.

Of Wiley's six works here the most impressive is his painted-plaster *Slant Step Becomes Rhino/Rhino Becomes Slant Step*, 1966, which embodies the step with multiple associations by the addition of a pointed horn/phallus erect from the center of the slant. Its dark rough

surface suggests the leathery bestial snout; alternately, the shaft emerging from where a crotch would be seated on the "chair" suggests human anatomy. Both transformations shift in and out from the direct identification of the object as simply a slanted step.

Despite the paltry number of strong works of art that the nebulous entity elicited, "Slant Step Revisited" is significant for presenting an artists' talisman that Grace Glueck asserted in 1966 was "as famous on the Coast as the fur-lined teacup was in Paris." The collection recaptures a period of artistic ferment and audacious invention, one which now appears far removed from present, more sober, attitudes to creative exploration.

—SUZAAAN BOETTGER

May 83
San Francisco

Slant here
Arneson

"The Slant Step Revisited," Richard L. Nelson Gallery, University of California, Davis:

Neither utilitarian nor esthetic, the enigmatic object known as the "Slant Step" has again surfaced as the namesake and centerpiece of an exhibition of work by Northern-California artists. Twice before, in 1966 and 1970, the ambiguously angled form inspired thematic shows based on its shape or use. An object too low to function as a step, too slanted to serve as a seat, yet with a backboard as on a chair, its intended purpose remains a mystery. Not simply nonfunctional but antifunctional, its contradictions appealed to the adversative avant-garde. Moreover, its identification was perversely opened enough for it to act as a catalyst for the mood of flamboyant experimentation prevalent in the late '60s. With its beat-up plywood structure covered by peeling, streaked green linoleum, the rustic object became a perfect talisman for the locals who would later be termed

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