

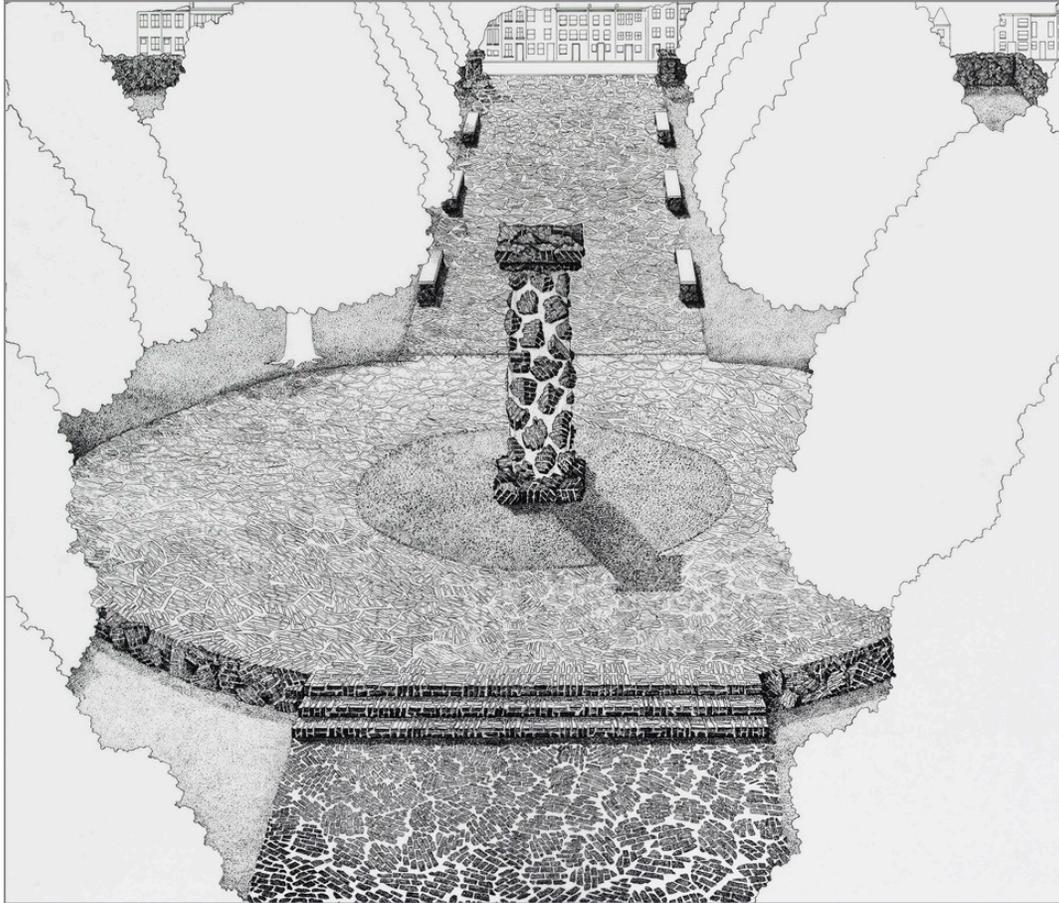
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## **Marc Blane at White Columns**

By David Craven

From Duchamp till the present, much of the important art in the twentieth century has been an assault on aesthetic limits. Robert Smithson, for example, continually fought "cultural confinement" and advocated the limitless art of land reclamation. Recently reemphasized by Robert Morris, this expansion of art through an astringent process of recycling has been given a profound new inflection by Marc Blane. Working in the marginal zone between high and no culture, Blane has penetrated the fine arts from the outside, rather than just pushing art outward from within. His recent show at White Columns featured "Reconstructionist" art which clearly earned him the right to label himself a "visual terrorist." While Marx warned against vanguard terrorism because it leads to outrunning history, thus holding it hostage, Marc Blane is a visual terrorist because he intends to liberate certain people held hostage by history. Blane not only seeks to recycle depressing residue as art but, in doing so, to rupture the cycle which creates this oppressive rubble. Under the aegis of his Rubble Reconstruction Company, Blane's art deals less with land reclamation as art than with social reclamation through art.

The most physically obtrusive part of the show at White Columns was the green bottles, an array of dozens of pint sized wine bottles strewn on the floor in a random sprawl, next to stacks of boxes labeled Abandoned Buildings. The boxes contain more of these cheap wine bottles, which effectively identify certain things in spite of their deceptive anonymity. Blane collected each bottle, boxed and unboxed, in various parts of New York City, from the Lower East Side to the South Bronx. Every bottle has been decanted by a wino, as anonymous and nameless as the green bottles used by Blane. The grim repeatability and replaceability of both is an idea central to the cycle of embeddedness in this work. Enclosed within each bottle is a burnt-edge photo of a burned-out building in New York near the site where the bottle was found. "Burned-out" is a term that connotes a drunken state; it also literally denotes gutted buildings—the architectural environment of "burned-out" bums. In Blane's work, the context is contained in the wine bottle, thus initiating an ironic game of emboitement: the socially marginal drink cheap wine, the original content of the bottles, which further bottles them up in an environment that becomes the newly bottled content in Abandoned Buildings. As Gallo, the producer of these variously named rotgut wines realizes, you need one in order to have the other, because mass consumption presupposes the consumption of masses.



Pillar Park – 1981 – 24" x 36" – ink on film

The boxes themselves activate several registers of meaning. These boxes stand for Abandoned Buildings, that is, buildings left in this state or a corporation by this name which produces them. The name also signifies what is inside: bottles that literally contain photographs of abandoned buildings. The wine bottle itself is not merely a symbol for its context; it is a synecdochal part of the definition of "abandoned buildings" and it drags the wine along with it. In this sense, the bottle not only contains a "message" it is part of the message, found on a sea of debris and destruction, the ruins of contemporary American society. As a "friend" of the wine, this commodity fetish is endowed with a life of its own. Consumerism originated when producers themselves were turned into consumers; Gallo has found a way to increase consumption in a period when there is a decline in the number of producers owing to unemployment. Gallo's rotgut has come close to cornering the "impossible" market, which consists of the most marginally consuming non-producers.

Various proposals in the show dealt with the reuse of abandoned buildings in the South Bronx. In a series of his meticulous architectural drawings, Blane presented ideas for using this rubble as the building material for outdoor suites. Pillar Park is one such proposal with a double edge. Consisting of a circular area with two long connecting walkways, the park is centered by a quasi-Doric column. All these elements feature a placement of the brick clusters in such a way that their earlier existence as rubble has not been erased but self-consciously relocated in another setting. The viewer is reminded of what this material was, and shown how it has become significantly different. This synthetic experience is as important as the formal configuration itself, since the people who frequent such a park are given a view of what could lie beyond the present, even as they are reminded of the past. As such, the omnipresence of the present—unavoidable to anyone

for whom life is merely a matter of surviving—is called into question by works like Pillar Park. Once the future and the past are dislodged from the present, the present itself becomes filled with new possibilities.

Just as gutted buildings must be disassembled, so hollow notions of the locus of art's meaning must be debunked. Thus, Blane's work is as powerful as it is visibly destructive, as significant as it is socially reconstructive. His work becomes what Marcuse said all important contemporary art must be: an expression of alienation that is nevertheless intertwined with optimism for the future, an art of emphatic negativity which seeks to affirm in a radically different way. Blane's projects do not merely question what art has been limited to heretofore; they also question the very nature of the society which constructs these limits.

Courbet tore down the column in the Place Vendome; Marc Blane is proposing that we rebuild it, only not as it has been. In the nineteenth century it was remarked that the only possible construction was total destruction. Blane is responding that aesthetic construction must now use what continues to be unremittingly destroyed. (White Columns, January 8-27)