

# Art's quantum leap to nothingness . . .

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Art Critic

What if you gave an art exhibit and no art showed up?

Well, until the end of August, the Or Gallery is staging a five-artist show which at first glance looks empty. One wall has striped wallpaper with an empty frame on it. Another wall has the words **THE MERE INTERCHANGE** printed on it. The last wall has a small piece of paper with the expression, **'IT CAN ONLY BE KNOWN AS SOMETHING ELSE'** typed on it, and what looks like a magazine ad and a cashier's tape from a grocery store beside that.

The floor has a circle on it in chalk.

So that's the show. This exhibit, to the untrained eye, looks just as I have described it, but in fact the collected artists are internationally acclaimed conceptual artists; these are artists who can best be labelled as thinkers rather than doers. Their art is idea more than object. So in truth this is perhaps the best conceptual art exhibition ever to be assembled in Vancouver.

Nothing is more pretentious than post-conceptual artists who are making thoughtful obscure objects in the hope of redoing what these five artists did, or more correctly, didn't do in the 1960s and early '70s.

I like this display for its direct adherence to the rules of its own game. No concessions for the new expressionism, no attempt to make the show visually appealing — in the true tradition of conceptualism, this show is empty of art but a veritable shrine for thinking about what's not there.

## REVIEW

In the catalogue to the show, Vancouver artist Ian Wallace states, "I wanted the focus not to be on conceptual art as a generalized phenomenon, but rather on the experience of actual works of art, however marginal they may be as objects." The Or exhibit, says Wallace, is meant to show "how freedom from the object can present new possibilities of meaning."

Now this may be a little difficult to understand at first. How can art without being anything in fact be anything at all? Well, what is required is the ultimate openness on the part of the viewer. He or she must believe in the art's minimal presence as being more than what it is.

Unlike a painting where we enter the world of accepted art behavior — a picture, the artist's ability to handle the paint, the museums around the world that collected paintings — a piece of paper stuck to a gallery wall with a few typed words is a quantum leap to nothingness.

Yet collector David Bellman, from whose Toronto gallery these works were selected, believes in the works by Robert Barry (the typed paper), Daniel Buren (the wallpaper), Dan Graham (the magazine ad), Lawrence Weiner (**MERE INTERCHANGE**) and Ian Wilson (the circle).

This is a classic example of the most serious state to which the negation of art ever dissolved. It may be hard to see. It may be hard to understand. But it's there for those who still believe in the artist's head as his only real garret.