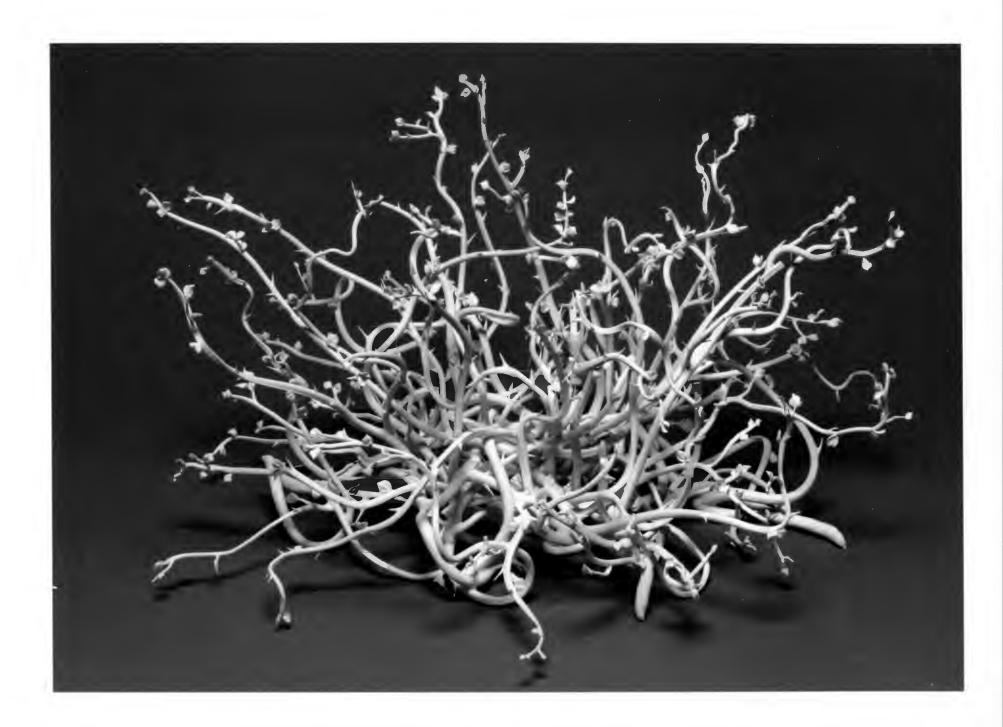


CHARLES SIMONDS

MENTAL EARTH

GROWTHS AND SMEARS



## CHARLES SIMONDS MENTAL EARTH GROWTHS AND SMEARS

NOVEMBER 3, 2011-JANUARY 14, 2012

ESSAY BY ARTHUR C. DANTO

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## CHARLES SIMONDS AND THE VERSATILITY OF CLAY

Though no one in the Seventies would have described it as one of the last pre-global decades—that could be said only retrospectively, when globalism had set in-I once heard Roy Lichtenstein ask whatever happened in the Seventies, as if it were a decade without interest, artistically speaking. I imagine his question was based on the absence of a new movement in painting, like Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, or Pop in the 1960s. In truth there was wonderful painting being done in the Seventies, but not as part of a movement. There was little in the way of movements in the decade at all, barring the Pattern and Decoration movement toward the end of the decade, or the emergence of Performance Art somewhat earlier. But it is difficult to mock a period with such photographers in it as Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin and Robert Mapplethorpe, or the remarkable experimentations in sculpture by Eva Hesse (though she died in 1970), Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, Sol Lewitt and Charles Simonds. Again, their work did not gel into a movement—Simonds and Matta-Clark, though friends, were poles apart as artists. But nothing like Spiral Jetty, Serra's cast ingots, Matta-Clark's cut houses, or Simonds' dwellings made of small clay bricks, built, he claimed, for what he called "Little People," had antecedents in sculptural history. Formalism - Clement Greenberg's philosophy -remained the orthodoxy of museums and was indispensable for docents, but what was happening outside museums was immune to isms. That was the benefit of the Sixties to young people who were eager to use art to address social and political issues in fresh ways. An important exhibition of the Eighties was called Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream. Its period was 1970 to the present. The large entry of women into the art world in the Seventies, together with feminist critiques of painting, may have given prominence to sculpture, and shaped the entire decade.



Tracks, 1970, latex, 24 x 48 inches

This essay concerns the thought and art of Charles Simonds, born in New York in 1945 to parents, both of whom were psychoanalysts, who had fled from Vienna. He believes that his art is a small footnote to his mother's career, but his thought, together with the art he has produced, has something of the systematic character of a religion on one side and of philosophy on the other. What is striking is that clay is his medium, since clay had been, for the most part, a substance adopted by craftspersons for the production of figurines and domestic vessels. But from the beginning, Simonds used clay as his primary material, in the service of high art, having learned from the ceramicist James Melchert that clay can be used to make anything, even a zipper. And the primordial nature of the material is of ultimate significance in understanding Simonds' work.

The Knoedler exhibition raises conceptual issues that touch on philosophy and science, and includes sculptures of objects rarely used as subjects, such as tumbleweeds, fashioned out of porcelain into something exceptionally beautiful—a dangerous term to use as an adjective which is more often an expletive than a description.

The Little People, whose artist Simonds became, had settled in a relatively squalid part of lower Manhattan—an area of abandoned manufacturing buildings that had been industrial—which encompassed the Lower East Side (from 14th to Houston Streets, between Avenues A and D), as well as the area that was destined to become SoHo, the glamorous quarter of artists and boutiques that flourished in the Eighties. At the beginning of the Seventies, no one had yet imagined SoHo. Rather, the city's planners and politicians dreamed of expressways, a city made for automobiles. Their opponents believed it belonged to people who grew up there. But no one thought it belonged to artists, other than the artists themselves, who found illegal lodging in lofts where labor had been performed when New York was an industrial center.

Simonds thought the area belonged to Little People, who actually occupied spaces that by the early Seventies were part of the urban squalor and decay. Their dwellings were constructed, most characteristically, in irregular, accidental spaces in downtown walls that belonged to neglected or abandoned buildings. It was as if the Little People chose sites that could not otherwise be utilized. I think of Socrates, in Plato's *Republic*, designing a society no other society would care to conquer, so little did it have anything worth fighting for. The tiny dwellings for invisible inhabitants had little to fear, other than being washed away by rain, or the vandalisms endemic to slums. But downtown Manhattan, where Simonds worked, had an inexhaustible supply of otherwise useless crevices to build in.

There are films (by Rudy Burckhardt and others) that show Simonds at work in the Seventies, surrounded by an appreciative body of spectators, mainly neighborhood children. He lays a course of small clay bricks, with slightly longer lintels crowning the windows and doors, using a large tweezers to place the bricks. Nothing better illustrates his workspace than a film that shows an automobile in flames in the background, to which neither he nor his audience is paying the slightest attention. Burning automobiles was a routine activity for young males with nothing better to do. Apart from the small dwelling taking form, brick by brick, it is a scene of undiluted squalor, Simonds' art excepted. In an e-mail, Simonds writes:

I think no one has ever been able to realize how radical the Dwellings in the street actually are. And how I still perceive them to be. The art consciousness is entirely time culture bound, unable to see outside itself, as is normal. But my role in that context refers to many other cultural referents as regards the artist's role in a culture or a society.



Charles Simonds working on Dwelling, East Houston Street, New York City, 1972

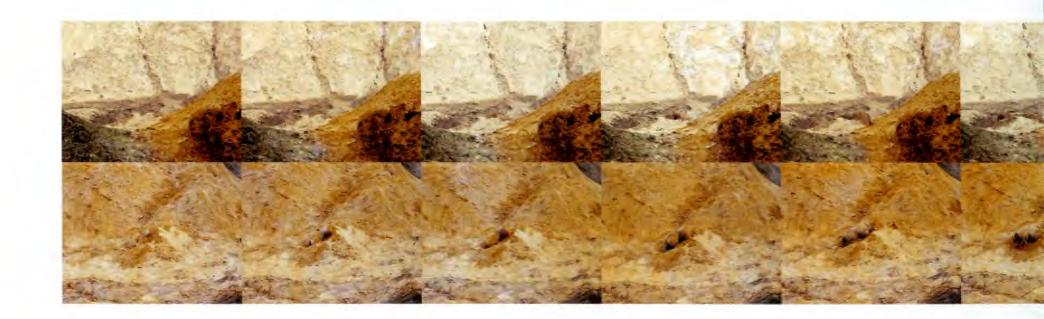
One has to remember that Simonds had participated in the 1960s student uprisings in California, and having chosen to be an artist, looked for a radical outlet. It was not long in coming. One day, in 1969, he sprinkled some sand on a clay surface and felt that he had found a magic place for himself. The idea of Little People came shortly after. He writes that he thought constantly of the Little People, like a man obsessed.

Not only did he build the miniature dwellings. He created a theory of the Little People's sociology and history. Simonds' 1975 essay "Three Peoples" (published by the Saman Gallery, Genoa) describes three different groups of Little People: people who live following a line, a circle, or a spiral. Mostly the differences are in their attitudes toward their past. The Linear People leave the past behind, and represent, I surmise, the population of Lower Manhattan, who seek a life different from the one they have left behind. The Circular People, by contrast, honor their past by continuing to live it. The Spiral People bury their past, "The Myth of Three Peoples," if we may so designate it, is, Simonds writes, "a warped mirror towards different cultures at different times and to comment (Swiftian) on our own (perhaps self destructive) Spiral." The "warped mirror" then reflects us. In burying the past, what happens to the Spiral People is that they lose their way. Simonds is remarkable as an artist/philosopher for this piece of writing, intended to be Swiftian, probably because there is a literary connection between the Lilliputians and the Little People. One of the academic highlights of Simonds' time at Berkeley was reading Paradise Lost with Stanley Fish, then a brash young instructor. It gave him a sense of an epic past, which the Spiral People bury, to their detriment. The revolutionaries of 1968 discussed John Stuart Mill while occupying the President's office at Columbia, or so I was told standing next to one of my students in the men's room in Low Memorial Library, where the office was situated. The students in general kept their education alive throughout the demonstrations.

I asked Simonds if the distinguishing attributes of the different tribes of Little People are visible in their dwellings. There are three kinds of dwellings. Simonds wrote, "The Little People have experienced an evolution of their dwellings' architecture that has 'mapped' their origin beliefs onto their evolving architectural forms (being born from the earth, considering the earth as a body, seeing architectural structures as bodies)."

The "mythologies" of the Little People are "expressed and recorded" in three films, which Simonds made in the early Seventies: "Birth," "Landscape Abody-Dwelling," and "Body-Earth." What were originally sacred "body"-informed parts of the landscape have been abstracted and evolved into architectural structures: "breast" landforms became domes, etc. So far, I have not found an extended discussion of this by Simonds, though commentators on his art of this period have enlarged on his ideas. Together, this trilogy of films forms a cornerstone of Simonds' work—the fundamental representation of the mythology of his belief structure. In "Birth," the first thing we see is a barren landscape, with a kind of cleft. Suddenly an androgynous figure emerges from the cleft, a newborn human, but hardly an infant. In "Landscape-Body-Dwelling," the figure lies on its back, piling sand on its body. In the final take, the figure is placing the bricks we know from the dwellings, which the artist is now erecting on his own body. The earth is body, since it has brought forth a human. And the body becomes a dwelling. Earth, body, dwelling are stages.

Apart from the surrealist films of Maya Deren, I know nothing to compare with Simonds' films. The film "Birth" was shown in the *Biennale de Paris* of 1973, where it gave Simonds a Continental identity. It was the hit of the show. But Simonds did not at first accept the invitations that came his way. In his unpublished memoir, he describes a phone call that was made to the telephone of Lucy Lippard, whom he was seeing at the time. The speaker, in broken English, said that he had seen his film at the *Biennale* in Paris and would like to





visit him and discuss an exhibition in Paris. The speaker was Daniel Abadie, then a curator at the Centre Nationale d'Art Contemporain, and later director of the Jeu de Paume (a prestigious Parisian exhibition space for contemporary art). Simonds responded that he was not interested, and that he was working on New York's Lower East Side. He refused a second call. I think I understand him. My first wife, ten years earlier, had pleaded with me to travel to France on my first sabbatical. I felt there was no point, since the serious art was being done in New York. (We went to France, greatly to my benefit.)

Simonds felt his audience was essentially the watchers he worked for, and, because of that, he felt alienated from what he calls the "art world consciousness," in which the artist has a different relationship to those who usually look at his/her work in the institutions of the art world. He regarded himself as a "street artist," and, to a certain extent, still does. The work in Knoedler's show is in no sense street work, apart from one work in the shape of a dwelling (*Two Streams*). But it stands in relationship to the dwellings of the Seventies in a very different way than those dwellings did to the Little People. In the Seventies, and in Manhattan, the Little People *inhabited* his buildings. The building piece in the exhibition is a representation of the dwellings the Little People occupy.

There is a section in his autobiographical fragment in which Simonds writes that he would "sense the presence" of art world individuals standing with the usual watchers, while he was working on a dwelling at 112 Greene Street. If they did ask what he was doing, Simonds would explain that he was making a home for Little People. "I realized that they were artists and clearly they saw me as truly ridiculous and probably nuts."

At that time, avant-garde, minimalist art was in the ascendant and the thought of "figurative, fantasy, narrative, soft, ephemeral and clay (read craft, amateur) 'artwork'" appeared totally silly and crazy.

And "out in the street" made it even more absurd.

There is little doubt that Minimalism was deeply in vogue in the Seventies, and "craft" was beyond the pale of serious artists. That is hardly the case today, despite which Simonds retains his resistance to the particular way that he perceives "art world consciousness."

By having discovered the audience in the street, i.e "the everyday person," I have been forced to realize how limiting appear to me the goggles of an art culture, historicized and consumed in the particular way that I perceive ours to be at this moment. . . . So working in the streets of different countries and in different historical and geographical moments and sociologies and also having worked with patients in a mental hospital . . . I've realized that responses to my work through other cultural goggles and audiences (ethnographically, archeologically, psychologically, psychoanalytically, sociologically, politically [vis à vis communities], architecturally and religiously) are more interesting to me. I have come to believe my "art making" is at variance to the normal existing "art" contexts. . . .

This is a strong position, and an important one, and it belongs to the artist's portrait of himself. It would not be part of a portrait of me. Mine is based on the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel draws a distinction between two kinds of what he calls spirit, Objective Spirit and Absolute Spirit. I find Hegel's distinction useful in today's art scene. Objective Spirit consists in large part of the institutions that facilitate social and cultural life. Most of the cases of art that he mentions belong to what today we call visual culture. As part of Absolute Spirit, art

belongs with philosophy and religion, as helping define the meaning of what belongs to being human. As part of Objective Spirit, a highway sign of a gasoline pump tells the driver that gasoline is available at the next exit. Jacques-Louis David's masterpiece *Marat Assassinated*, today in the Louvre, belongs to Absolute Spirit. Marat was what today we would call a blogger, whose publication—*The Voice of the People*—was highly incendiary. He was stabbed in his bathtub by an aristocrat, Charlotte Corday. David's image evokes an allusion from the bathtub to the sepulcher, and hence from Marat to Jesus. It tells us to help make the revolution Marat died for, as Jesus died through suffering for the salvation of mankind. His painting belongs to Absolute Spirit, in the sense that its message is a political definition of man, and a religious interpretation of our duty.

In any event, Simonds' films created his reputation in Europe, and with that the effort on the part of art administrators to bring him and his work to their countries. It is worth a parenthesis that in the Seventies and well beyond, Europe was interested in American artists whose work was scarcely noticed in their own country. Chateaubriand's "Noble Savage" was a European idea. The idea of a nude savage emerging from the Earth was compelling. It was what motivated a curator like Daniel Abadie to persist in bringing Simonds to France. He succeeded in 1976. Simonds laid down, as a condition for coming, that he be allowed to work in the streets of Paris. He settled in Belleville, a working class quarter, where the Little People could count on the nooks and crannies they were familiar with from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. "My work in Belleville sent shock waves through Paris," he writes, and those who know France understand what he is talking about. It meant that the French would need to know, in depth, about little houses and the Little People, the differences between the Linear People, the Circular, and the Spiral People, and how their architectures reflect their relationships to their past. (When I won the Prix Philosophie, I was interviewed to a frazzle.)

Once Simonds was pried loose from downtown Manhattan, he began to

receive invitations that enabled him to work in the streets of different countries. In Germany, someone who looked and acted like Simonds was suspicious, especially so when the Baader-Meinhof Gang was still on the loose. His neighbors were more than ready to alert the police to strangers who might belong to that menacing cohort. Simonds experienced interrogations by German police. Asked what he was doing, he explained that he was building little houses for Little People. The officers, seemingly satisfied with Simonds' words, said that they would check his progress, which they did. In China, just as the Cultural Revolution was waning, he worked in the streets of Guilin and Shanghai, though knowing neither how to speak Chinese nor how to read it. He was determined to build a landscape, though his hands shook. "My entire body was shaking with fear. I was afraid that at any moment someone would grab me by the scruff of my neck and cart me off." Simonds was determined to make a piece in a Chinese city. Remember though that the Cultural Revolution was recent. I consider him heroic! One day he asked the guide what people were saying and she said they thought what he was making was beautiful but they couldn't understand why he was doing it.

There are pieces cognate to the dwellings, in Knoedler's exhibition, which are not street work. The central pieces on view are definitely of another order. They derive from his theories—philosophical, religious, scientific. This gives him an unusual situation in the history of contemporary art. His work is inflected by politics. Keep in mind that he believes the little houses are radical. It involves a certain view of an artistic audience. An exhibition like the one at Knoedler called for a different order of art.

I met Charles Simonds in Valencia, Spain, in 2004. I had just finished a three-day conference in Murcia on my ideas, especially regarding the end of art. It was an easy train ride from Murcia, a town in the southeast corner of Spain, to Valencia,



Charles Simonds working in Shanghai, China, 1980

Mental Earth, 2002, metal, polyurethane, paper and clay,  $72 \times 126 \times 89$  inches

where I had been invited to speak to the students at the Academy of Fine Art, where Goya had been a member. There was a Matisse exhibition at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) that we wanted to see, and while waiting for someone in the gallery, Charles rushed up with hugs. He was there to install an exhibition of his work. We had close friends in common in New York, and we became friends with Charles quickly. Alas, we did not see the show, since we were expected in Barcelona, and hence missed a remarkable work, *Mental Earth*. It was not in the rather stupendous catalogue IVAM published on Simonds (he continued to work on *Mental Earth* when the IVAM catalogue had to go to press), and I knew nothing about it until I was sent photographs of some of the pieces that were to be in the show at Knoedler. Hence I had no idea of its existence until it turned up in an installation photograph.

I thought *Mental Earth* was the most compelling work I had seen for a long time. It is a sculpture, rich and deep, and shown suspended from the ceiling. Initially I read it as an Annunciation, since one of the figures is unquestionably an Angel, with powerful wings. (Simonds has, rather, acknowledged a formal relationship to the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*.) It reminded me of a masterpiece by one of the limewood sculptors of Germany, likeTilman Riemenschneider. Both figures are dark reddish, and feel energized from within. But the usual object of the Angel's Announcement is not obviously the Virgin. It looks like a fish, with a hole for its eye. What could it understand of the Angel's Announcement? What could it make of the Holy Ghost? And what is the meaning of the work for us? I wondered if it might have to do with the celebrated fiestas in Valencia. I sent Simonds an e-mail begging him to explain what it is about; it turned out to have an interpretation that I would never have anticipated.

Simonds begins with a search. It is a search for "the most 'primitive, primordial (thoughtless)' gesture that would be the corollary to my (symbolically) most 'primitive' and 'primordial' material: clay. It is an attempt to use my body



to create forms and gestures." He is very generous with his explanations, and, as a critic, I am always eager to discover what an artist had in mind. When I discovered the content of this work, I realized that I would never have deciphered it on my own. It is clearly not a street piece. It is not a religious piece. It is in fact a philosophical piece, though a surprising one.

Simonds connects his search to his mother's career and research. This centers on what he construes as the mind/body problem. His mother, Dr. Anita I. Bell, as I noted, was a psychoanalyst. She was concerned with childhood development, and with how a child's discovery of its body and how its body functions affects its psychology. She developed a theory of male castration anxieties that found their locus in the testicles rather than the penis, and had their origins in a perceptual conflation and confusion in the infant between ascending testicular movements that occurred at the same time as bowel movements. The infant confuses ascending testicular movements and the disappearance (elimination) of feces. Toward the end of her career she worked at Yale's sleep research laboratory trying to measure and connect testicular (cremaster muscle) and "skin anxiety markers" to dream content. She would wake the students and ask what they were dreaming when they had anxious dreams.

All this serves as preamble to the meaning of *Mental Earth*. Simonds writes about his photographic studies of his own feces over time. "What are the 'forms' my body can produce without the benefit of will?" I had never read a philosopher who used defecation as an example, but Saint Augustine and Denis Diderot speculated on the male erection, which happens in the absence of will and fails to happen despite the will. Simonds writes:

This question of the "will"-less gesture has always been one of the basic issues in my work. . . . Where do "will" and imagination meet

material (material reality, meant physically and "philosophically")? Mental Earth has its origins in there.

One of Simonds' most remarkable sculptures is called *Smear*. I had never seen a work that simply depicts a smear, and thought it exceedingly wry. But there is more to it than that. Simonds is interested in the smear because it "tries to capture the most primitive of gestures. The smear, as in a child's thoughtless smears (implicitly of its feces)." Created in clay, that most primitive of gestures, the *Smear*, is literally married to its corollary, the most primordial of materials.

All in all, this work and other recent ones have served to allow me to explore my own psyche in a less coherent and didactic way . . . (for myself and others) not requiring a coherent story, but providing an arena that allows me to engage in a free form my own *horror vacui* onto a material.

To me, *Smear* and *Mental Earth* are also akin to the hand movement of a common Italian gesture expressing disregard and contempt. One places one's hand under one's chin, and then moves it in an outward sweep expressing contempt throughout, the wiping away of something loathsome. This universal gesture expresses disregard and contempt throughout Italy. And surely one can find a similar connection in meaning between the smear and the expletive "*merde*."

The Knoedler exhibition demonstrates the way clay can be put to sculptural ends well beyond the teapot and the doll. There is *Mental Earth*, with its somewhat arcane origin in will-less action, and the production of feces. There are the beautiful white porcelain tumbleweeds. A clay sculpture related to the tumbleweeds, *Houseplant No. 2*, was installed beneath *Mental Earth* in the IVAM exhibition, and before I received Simonds' explanation, I wondered if it



was a part of *Mental Earth*. I asked the artist to write a few words that would emphasize the "versatility of clay." Here is part of his response:

The most recent piece that will be in the show, *Two Streams*, is intended to explore some similar issues as the others you mention. Which to me are "sculptural" issues of, for instance, how to imply more space beyond the object (as if the landscape continues beyond the configuration of the sculpture itself). Thus, like the others, attempting to offer "glimpses" of a narrative, vignettes of a larger story in time (narrative) and space (sculptural landscape). The others combine these concerns with other content issues as regards conflations of body, land and energy (twists, smears etc.). Beyond this, in the show are the other works (two tabletop pieces, *Grown Walls*, which looks like a flower made of brick walls and a more recent one, *Ruined Blossoms*) which explore issues of mixed metaphors in my work of building and growing. . . . There will also be the *Growth House* drawing from 1975.

Two Streams is "a little house for Little People," a bit more European, more than a bit more elegant than the early dwellings Simonds constructed in the East Side of New York in the Seventies. It fits its new context, and led me to my final question. I asked Simonds whether he still works in the streets. This was his answer:

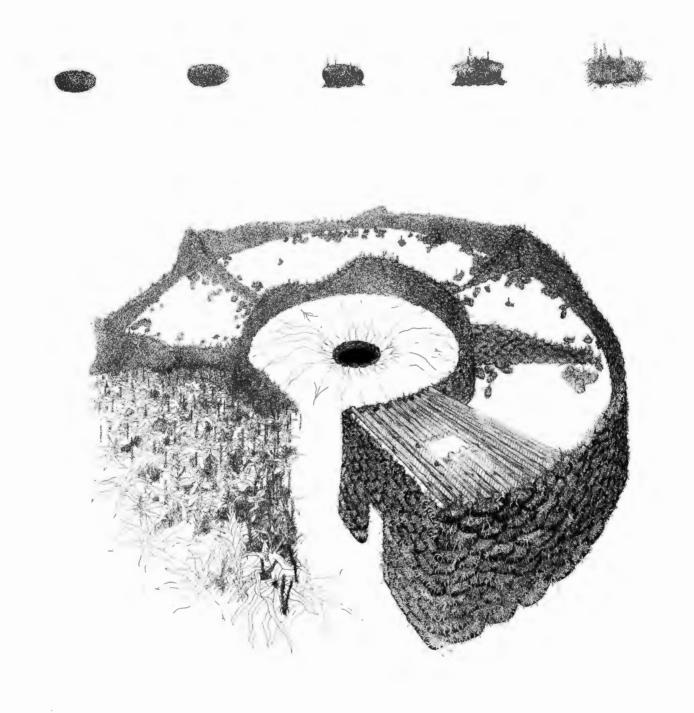
I still work in the street when I do an exhibition in a new city. Usually I just go out and do it without allowing it to be publicized, since if it is, it provokes souvenir seekers from the art world. In Valencia, I worked in an area called Malverosa, a popular community that still has the old buildings that were used to construct and warehouse boats.

Growth House, 1975, ink on paper, 25 3/4 x 29 1/2 inches
A seasonally renewable Dwelling made of earthen bricks with seeds inside.
As the seeds sprout, growth transforms the built structure; the Dwelling is converted from shelter to food and is harvested and eaten.

## **ENVOI**

Because this is an essay on the thought and art of Charles Simonds, rather than an art historical treatise, there are no footnotes. Some of the original e-mails, however, are included as an appendix to this catalogue. This is not because there is no bibliography on Charles, but because he had to have been the source of these writings. He is still the source for questions bearing on his *oeuvre*, which, since he remains a productive artist, comprises works of a kind that early writers on him could not have imagined. As the most recent writer, I have had access to his most recent thoughts, which are contained in a series of e-mails, responding to my questions. This has proved indispensable, since the meaning of the central work in the exhibition, *Mental Earth*, could not have been fathomed without the arcane revelations in his e-mail of September 10, 2011. "Mental Earth" would be an ideal title for his work *in toto*, consisting as it does of clay that embodies thoughts that at the very least compass philosophy and psychoanalysis. In any case, the e-mails have been my archive. But in addition, he has given me access to a kind of artistic autobiography, which casts light on everything he has done.

My approach to the work is in the first instance philosophical, and in the second art critical. Charles writes in an e-mail that the problem of actions performed without volitions has concerned his concept of art making. I have made it a central question in my system of philosophy, especially in my book, Analytical Philosophy of Action, which has, as its pendant, Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge. It is not that these are authoritative, but only that I am conversant and sympathetic. It would be the rarest of art historians to have thought about such questions. The same could be said about artists. This makes Charles a singularly original figure in contemporary art. I am deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to address Charles Simonds' work from within.















#### **CHARLES SIMONDS**

## **CHRONOLOGY**

- 1945 Born in New York. Youngest son of two Vienna-trained doctors and psychoanalysts. Father is a Freudian and mother is a renegade Freudian.
- 1952-63 Attends New Lincoln School.
- 1963–67 Attends the University of California, Berkeley. Meets and later marries Joanne Maude Oakes. Participates in Free Speech movement. Works as a teamster on assembly line. Studies with James Melchert, who showed that clay can be anything, even a zipper. Also studies with Harold Paris, who made eroticized rubber sculpture.
- 1967 Receives Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Berkeley.
- 1967–69 Attends Rutgers University graduate school. Receives Master of Fine Arts degree.
- 1969–71 Teaches Sculpture and Art History at Newark State College. Refurbishes a loft at 131 Chrystie Street with Gordon Matta-Clark and Harriet Korman. Works on sculpture, Fragments of the Colossal Dream, using hair, bodily fluids, fantasy and traditional art historical imagery. Works in the streets of New York and environs with Gordon Matta-Clark, helping each other with projects. Creates Tarot cards, some of which develop from working in clay pits of Sayreville, New Jersey. Films Birth and Landscape ← Body ← Dwelling. Meets Christo, Holly Solomon and Jeffrey Lew. Works at 98 Greene Street and 112 Greene Street, alternative spaces, with George Trakas, Suzanne Harris, Keith Sonnier and Philip Glass. Begins migration of Little People dwellings northwards on Greene Street in New York. Travels to Stonehenge, Rome, Pompeii, Herculaneum and Vesuvius. Also travels to Djerba, Matmata, Dougga, Sfax and Tozeur in Tunisia. Leaves teaching one Friday afternoon. Rents delivery bicycle to hold clay and begins making dwellings full time in streets of New York, concentrating on the Lower East Side. Meets Lucy Lippard, who asks for a tour of dwellings.
- 1972 Begins living with Lucy Lippard on Prince Street. Watches the evolution of art-world feminism through her eyes. Writes *Three Peoples*, fictive ethnography, and creates *Life Architectures/Living*

Structures: Linear, circular and spiral dwellings. Becomes friends with Sol LeWitt, Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson. Exchanges professional roles for a day with President of Oberlin College, Robert Fuller, as an experiment. Summer: sails up and down the coast of Maine with Lucy Lippard. Does community work on the Lower East Side. Becomes member of the board of the Lower East Side Coalition for Human Housing. Creates Playlot "La Placita" with the Association of Community Service Centers and the Young New Yorkers. Film of *Dwellings* by Rudy Burkhardt shown at the Museum of

- 1974 Film of *Dwellings* by Rudy Burkhardt shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Excavated and Inhabited Railroad Tunnel Remains* constructed at Artpark, Lewiston, New York.
- 1975 Growth House constructed at Artpark, Lewiston, New York. Invited to take part in the Whitney Biennial. Refuses to put work in Museum but builds a dwelling in the street indicated by a sign in the museum. Has first one-person exhibition in Paris, curated by Daniel Abadie, at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain. Works in the streets of Belleville making dwellings. Meets Josefa, who is ten years old and believes in "little people" of her own and that food turns to poison in their mouths if they don't share it. Three Peoples is published by Ida Gianelli coinciding with an exhibition at Saman Gallery, Genoa. Works in streets of port area of Genoa making dwellings.
- Invited for "Projects" series at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where he creates *Picaresque Landscape*. Proposal for Stanley Tankel Memorial Hanging Gardens. Invited to exhibit at the Venice *Biennale*. Works in the streets of Giudecca. Creates a Linear People dwelling at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, as part of Earth Day festival.
- 1977 Participates in a housing project called "City Project Cleveland."
  Participates in *Documenta 6.* Goes to Berlin with DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst). Produces *Circles and Towers Growing* series.
- 1978 Visits Leningrad. Jürgen Schweinebraden organizes a clandestine individual exhibition in East Berlin. *Birthscape* constructed for the exhibition *Door beeldhouwers gemaakt (Made by Sculptors)* at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam: work shares room with Gordon Matta-Clark's and Simonds dedicates work to him upon learning of his death. Travels to Scotland, the Orkneys and Isle of Skye.
- 1979 *Cracking,* a fiction by Lucy Lippard based on Simonds' work, is published by Walther König, Cologne. It is used as the catalogue for an

- exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne and Nationalgalerie, Berlin. 1980 Ice House (Instant House), created in Iowa. Inflated spiral structure of cloth is sprayed with water and freezes overnight. Moves to loft on 22nd Street, New York. Camps out in the New Mexico desert to see floral bloom. Invited to participate in ROSC exhibition; builds dwellings in the streets of Dublin. Goes to China with Lucy Lippard, Sol LeWitt, Dorothy Lichtenstein and others. Works in streets of Shanghai and Guilin. 1981 Constructs permanent installations of dwellings at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Kunsthaus Zürich, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Begins cutting niches for dwellings as opposed to working with already existing spaces. Invited by Hans Haacke to teach advanced sculpture at Cooper Union, New York. First retrospective is organized by John Hallmark Neff, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Visits Glomar Challenger oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico. Cross-country skis in Banff, Yellowstone National Parks. Canoes boundary waters of Minnesota with John Beardsley and watches northern lights. Visits Death Valley. Invited to make dwellings for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Spends time working in the streets of Jerusalem. 1982 Meets Bella Meyer, whom he marries in 1985. 1983 Installs Age in rotunda at the Guggenheim Museum. Rents "bare boat" and sails the Virgin Islands, Caribbean. 1986 Invited to be a Fellow of Art at the American Academy in Rome. 1987 Exhibition at Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris: large scale "cracked" fired tile floor and walls of progressively changing sizes of bricks exhibited as components of a future planned house Simonds wants to build. Daughter Lia is born. 1988 Exhibition at Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.: Refuge model for permanent project for Seoul Korea Olympics and one "room" of project created full-scale. Travels to Seoul to construct Refuge in Olympic Park.
- SonTimothy is born.
   Works with patients at Centre d'étude de l'expression, Clinique des maladies mentales et de l'encéphale, Centre Hospitalier Sainte Anne, Paris on communal sculpture.
- 1996 Lectures at Centre Hospitalier Sainte Anne to therapists on work with patients the previous year.
- 1997 Works on transforming grotto for Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

### **FILMS**

Birth, 1970, with Rudy Burckhardt, 16 mm, color, 3 minutes

Dwellings, 1972, with David Troy, 16 mm, black and white, 11 minutes

Landscape←Body←Dwelling, 1973, with Rudy Burckhardt, 16 mm, color, 7 minutes

Body←Earth, 1974, with Rudy Burckhardt, 16 mm, color, 3 minutes

Dwellings Winter, 1974, with Rudy Burckhardt, 16 mm, color, 13 minutes

Niagara Gorge, 1974, with Emil Antonucci, 16 mm, color, 13 minutes

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1975–76 Charles Simonds: Demeures et Mythologies, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France. Publication accompanying the exhibition, Art/Cahier no. 2, with texts by Daniel Abadie and Charles Simonds. Artists Space, New York.

  Dwellings, Saman Gallery, Genoa, Italy.
- 1976–77 Charles Simonds: Picaresque Landscape, "Projects" series, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; New York Public Library, Tompkins Square, New York.
- 1977 Charles Simonds: Temenos, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Catalogue with texts by Daniel Abadie, Linda L. Cathcart and Charles Simonds.
- 1978 Schwebende Städte und andere Architekturen/Floating Cities and Other Architectures, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany; Bonner Kunstverein, Germany. Catalogue with texts by Daniel Abadie, Lucy R. Lippard, Herbert Molderings and Charles Simonds.
- 1979 Circles and Towers Growing, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany;
  Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany.

  Charles Simonds: Évolution imaginaire d'un paysage, Musée de
  l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix (MASC), Les Sables-d'Olonne, France.

  Publication accompanying the exhibition, Cahiers de l'Abbaye
  Sainte-Croix no. 32, with text by Gilbert Lascault.

  "Circles and Towers Growing," evolution imaginaire d'un paysage,
  Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris, France.

  Floating Cities and Other Architectures, Centre d'Art Contemporain,
  Geneva, Switzerland.
- 1980 Charles Simonds, Dartmouth College Museum, Beaumont-May Gallery, Hopkins Center, Hanover, New Hampshire. Charles Simonds: Installation, California State University, Fine Arts

Gallery, Art Department, Los Angeles.

- 1981–83 Charles Simonds: Circles and Towers Growing, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Texas; Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Catalogue with texts by Daniel Abadie, John Beardsley, John Hallmark Neff and Charles Simonds.
- 1982 Charles Simonds: Home Making, Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre, Alberta, Canada. Catalogue with text by John Beardsley, Lorne Falk and Charles Simonds.
- 1983 *Circles and Towers Growing, Age,* Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Brochure with text by Diane Waldman.
- 1984 House Plants and Rocks, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Catalogue with text by Charles Simonds.
- 1985 Charles Simonds: The Three Trees, Architekturmuseum, Basel, Switzerland. Catalogue (published in 1987) with texts by Ulrike and Werner Jehle-Schulte Strathaus.
- 1986 Simonds, Galerie Maeght Lelong, Paris, France. Publication accompanying the exhibition, Repères, Cahiers d'art contemporain no. 31, with text by Gilbert Lascault.
- 1987 Charles Simonds: Installation, Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris, France.
- 1988 Spectrum: Charles Simonds, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Catalogue with text by John Beardsley.
- 1989 Charles Simonds: Wall Smears and Rocks, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
- 1991 *Charles Simonds,* Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris, France.
- 1992 Strugg. Thebb... The Singing Monkey, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
- 1993 Charles Simonds, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
- 1994 *Charles Simonds, Retrospective,* Fundación "La Caixa," Barcelona, Spain.
- 1994–95 Charles Simonds, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, France. Catalogue with text by Daniel Abadie, Germano Celant and Jacques Lambert.
- 1999 Charles Simonds "Houseplants," Joseph Helman Gallery, New York.
- 1999– The Clay Grows Tall: The World of Charles Simonds, Denver Art
- 2000 Museum, Colorado.
- 2001 Is Was, Joseph Helman Gallery, New York. Brochure with text by Donald Kuspit.
- 2002 *Charles Simonds,* Galerie Enrico Navarra, Paris, France. Catalogue with text by Enrico Navarra, Jean-Louis Prat and Werner Spies.

- 2003 Charles Simonds, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), Spain.
  Catalogue with text by David Anfam, Kosme de Barañano, Lucy
  Lippard and Teresa Millet.
- 2004 *Charles Simonds: Demeures.* Les Abattoirs, Art Moderne et Contemporain, Toulouse, France. Brochure with text by Werner Spies.
- 2009 Landscape/Body/Dwelling: Charles Simonds at Dumbarton Oaks, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C. Catalogue (published in 2011) with texts by John Beardsley, Germano Celant, Linda Lott, Joanne Pillsbury and Ann Reynolds.
- 2011–12 Charles Simonds: Mental Earth, Growths and Smears, Knoedler & Company, New York. Catalogue with text by Arthur C. Danto.

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1971 112 Greene Street Group, 112 Greene Street, New York.
- 1973 *8th Biennale de Paris,* Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France. Catalogue.
- 1974 Interventions in Landscape, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
   Hayden Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Catalogue.
   Dwelling Places for Little People, Artpark, Lewiston, New York.
- 1975 Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Primitive Presence in the 70s, Vassar College Museum of Art, Poughkeepsie, New York. Catalogue with text by Nadia Tscherni. 9th Biennale de Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France. Catalogue.

Art in Landscape, traveling exhibition organized by Independent Curators International, Washington, D.C. Catalogue with text by Susan Sollins.

Small Scale, The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. Catalogue.

1976 *9th Biennale de Paris à Nice,* Musées de Nice, France. Catalogue with text by Günter Metken.

Subject, Object, Project: Projects for PCA, Philadelphia College of Art. Catalogue with text by Janet Kardon.

Rooms, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York.

International Events 1972–76, special exhibition at the XXXVII Biennale, Venice, Italy. Catalogue with text by Olle Granath.

1977 A Question of Scale, Visual Arts Museum, New York.
Naturbetrachtung-Naturverfremdung, Trilogie I, Württembergischer

Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany. Catalogue.

Documenta VI, Kassel, Germany. Catalogue with text on Charles
Simonds by Michael Maek Gérard.

Scale and Environment: 10 Sculptors, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis,

- Minnesota. Catalogue with text on Charles Simonds by Lisa Lyons.

  1977–78 Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California; Seattle Art Museum, Washington. Catalogue with text on Charles Simonds by John Beardsley.
- 1978 Sculpture/Nature, Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains (CAPC),
  Bordeaux, France. Catalogue with text by Jean-Louis Froment.

  XXXVIII Biennale, Venice, Italy. Catalogue.

  Architectural Analogues, Whitney Museum of American Art,
  Downtown Branch, New York. Catalogue with text by Lisa Phillips.

  Door Beeldhouwers Gemaakt/Made by Sculptors, Stedelijk Museum,
  Amsterdam, Netherlands. Catalogue.

*Dwellings,* Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Catalogue with text by Lucy Lippard.

1979 Contemporary Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Catalogue.

Ten Artists/Artists Space, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York. Catalogue with text by Helene Winer.

- 1979–80 Masks Tents Vessels Talismans, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Catalogue with text by Janet Kardon.
- Architectural References, Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, Canada. Catalogue with text by Babs Shapiro.

  Pier + Ocean: Construction in the Art of the Seventies, Hayward Gallery, London, England; Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands. Catalogue with text by Gerhard von Graevenitz.

  Architectural Sculpture, Institute of Contemporary Art, California State University, Los Angeles. Catalogue with text by Debra Burchett.

  ROSC—'80, National Gallery of Ireland, University College, School of Architecture, Dublin. Catalogue.
- 1981 *Mythos und Ritual in der Kunst der 70er Jahre,* Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1982 Vergangenheit-Gegenwart-Zukunft, Trilogie II, Würtembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany. Catalogue.

  Terres, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Catalogue.

- 1983 *New Art at the Tate Gallery, 1983,* The Tate Gallery, London, England. Catalogue.
- 1984 Return of the Narrative, Palm Springs Desert Museum, California.
  Catalogue.
  Cathey Billian, Michael Graves, Charles Simonds: Art for the Park,
  Liberty State Park Art Projects, Jersey City Museum, New Jersey.
  Catalogue with text by Tom Moran.
- 1985–86 Rethinking the Avant-Garde, Katonah Museum of Art, New York.
  Catalogue with text by Jonathan Fineberg.
  Transformations in Sculpture, Four Decades of American and
  European Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Catalogue.
- 1986 Steinberg, Simonds, Beuys, Galerie Maeght Lelong, Paris, France.
- The Eloquent Object, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.
  Traveling. Catalogue with text edited by Marcia and Tom Manhart.
  Leo Castelli and His Artists: 30 Years of Promoting Contemporary
  Art, Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico.
  Architecture as Image, Islip Art Museum, East Islip, New York.
  Fifty Years of Collecting: An Anniversary Selection. Sculpture of the
  Modern Era, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
  Catalogue with text by Thomas M. Messer.
- 1988 Big Little Sculpture, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

  Gordon Matta-Clark and Friends, Galerie Lelong, New York.

  Sculpture & Architecture Design, The Spectrum Series, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

  Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art, The Jewish Museum, New York. Catalogue.
- 1989 Selections from the Permanent Collection, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
  Miniature Environments, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York. Catalogue.
- 1989–90 Donations Daniel Cordier, Le regard d'un amateur, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Catalogue.
- 1997 Terres d'ici et d'ailleurs, Charles Simonds, Ousmane Sow, Espace d'Art Contemporain, Lycée Agricole Xavier Bernard, Rouillé, France. Catalogue.
- 2000 Andoe, Oppenheim, Simonds, Joseph Helman Gallery, New York.

  Collection Cordier, Les Abattoirs, Art Moderne et Contemporain,
  Toulouse, France.

- Set and Situations, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 2002 *Model World*, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut. Catalogue.
- 2004–05 Architecture & Arts: A Century of Creative Projects in Building, Design, Cinema, Painting, Photography, Sculpture, Palazzo Ducale, Genoa, Italy.
- 2006 Full House: Views of the Whitney's Collection at 75, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 2007–08 *Multiplex: Directions in Art, 1970,* The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 2008–09 Conversations in Clay (part of the multi-venue exhibition All Fired Up!), Katonah Museum of Art, New York.
  Miradas Arquitectonicas en la colección del IVAM, Museo de Bellas Artes Gravina (MUBAG), Italy. Catalogue.
- 2009 La Escultura en la Cóleccion del IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), Spain. Catalogue.
  Alternative Spaces, New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe.
- 2010 Mixed Use, Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices, 1970s to the Present, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. Catalogue with texts by Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, Douglas Crimp, Glenn Ligon, Emily Roysdon, Lytle Shaw, Shunk-Kender, Juan A. Suárez, Lena Sze and David Wojnarowicz. Artpark: 1974–1984, UB Art Gallery, Center for the Arts, Buffalo, New York, Catalogue.
- 2010–11 Monolithes ou l'Architecture en Suspens (1950–2010): Artistes et Architectes du FRAC Centre. Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain (FRAC) Centre, Orléans, France. Catalogue.

  Engaging with Nature: American and Native American Arts (A.D. 1200–2004), Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey.
- 2011 Otherworldly: Optical Delusions and Small Realities, Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Catalogue with text by David McFadden.

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- \_\_\_\_\_. "Charles Simonds: Le bâtisseur de rêves," *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris), January 12–18, 1995.
- Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, eds. *American Art in the 20th Century* (Munich: Prestel, 1993).
- Margarethe Jochimsen. "Kunst als soziale Strategie," *Kunstforum International* 27 (March 1978).
- Gerald Jonas. "The Talk of the Town: The Little People," *The New Yorker,* November 22, 1976.
- Hilton Kramer. "An Artist Emerging from the 60s Counterculture," *The New York Times,* December 13, 1981.
- Jacques Leenhardt. "L'Urbanisme parallèle de Charles Simonds," *La Gazette de Lausanne*, January 31, 1976.
- Jean-Jacques Lévêque and Hugo Verlomme. "Une réflexion sur un avenir possible: Charles Simonds," Les Nouvelles littéraires (Paris), November 24–30, 1975.
- Kate Linker. "Charles Simonds' Emblematic Architecture," *Artforum* 17, no. 7 (March 1979).
- Lucy R. Lippard. *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).
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- Dale McConathy. "Keeping Time: Some Notes on Reinhardt, Smithson and Simonds," *Artscanada* 32, nos. 198–199 (June 1975).
- Günter Metken. Spurensicherung: Kunst als Anthropologie und Selbsterforschung; Fiktive Wissenschaften in der heutigen Kunst (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 1977).
- Franz Meyer. "Utopie in der Kunst Kunst als Utopie." In *Utopien Die Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen,* edited by Jacqueline Baumann, Rosmarie Zimmermann and Hans-Jürg Braun. Zürcher Hochschulforum 9 (Zurich: Verlag der Fachvereine, 1987).
- Phil Patton. "The Lost Worlds of the 'Little People'," *Artnews* 82, no. 2 (February 1983).
- Annelie Pohlen. "Interview mit Charles Simonds," Heute Kunst/Flash Art 24 (January-February 1979).
- Karl Ruhrberg. Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert. Das Museum Ludwig, Köln (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta-Verlag, 1986).

- Emmanuel Saulnier. "Des lutins dans la ville," Libération (Paris), December 9, 1975. Pierre Schneider. "Les Lilliputiens de Simonds," L'Express (Paris), December 8-14, 1975. Barbara Schnierle. "Traumlöcher und Traditionen," Tip Magazin 10 (1979). Peter Selz. Art in Our Times, A Pictorial History 1890-1980 (New York: Abrams, 1981). Didier Semin. "Entretien avec Charles Simonds," Beaux Arts 39 (October 1986). Charles Simonds. "Miniature Dwellings," On Site 4 (1973). \_\_\_\_\_. "Microcosm to Macrocosm/Fantasy World to Real World" (includes conversation with Lucy R. Lippard), Artforum 12, no. 6 (February 1974). Letter to the Editor, Artforum 12, no. 9 (May 1974). \_\_\_\_. Art/Cahier no. 2 (Paris: SMI, 1975). \_\_\_\_. Three Peoples (Genoa: Samanedizione, 1975). Also included in the following publications: A. Sky and M. Stone. Unbuilt America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Alan Sondheim. Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America (New York: Dutton, 1977); "Drei Völker," Kunstmagazin 2 (1978); Friedmar Apel. "Der Baumeister der Traüme: Wirklichkeit und Gedankenspiel bei Charles Simonds," Sprache im Technischen Zeitalter 6 (July 1978); Schwebende Städte und andere Architekturen/ Floating Cities and Other Architectures, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (1978); Charles Simonds, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1981); NACA Journal 1 (1992). . Statement, Artforum 18, no. 5 (January 1980). (Summer 1980). . Statement, House Plants and Rocks, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (1984). \_\_\_. "Earth and Sanity/Terre et Santé," International Journal of Art Therapy 1 (1997).Alison Sky and Michelle Stone. Unbuilt America: Forgotten Architecture in the
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- Alan Sondheim, ed. *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America* (New York: Dutton, 1977).
- Werner Spies. "Geisterstädte des Unbewußten," Frankfurter Allgemeine, February 4, 1995.
- Mark Stevens. "The Dizzy Decade," Newsweek, March 26, 1979.
- Marie-Claude Volfin. "Une mystique sexuelle," *Info Artitudes* 3 (January 8–14, 1975).

#### SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Les Abattoirs - Art Moderne et Contemporain, Toulouse, France Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, New York Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California Denver Art Museum, Colorado Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain (FRAC) Centre, Orléans, France Maxine & Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan Fundación "la Caixa," Barcelona, Spain Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. Israel Museum, Jerusalem Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), Spain Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany Museum of Arts and Design, New York Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois The Museum of Modern Art, New York New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne, Germany Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

# **APPENDIX**

#### E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE

September 1, 2011

Dear Arthur,

Thanks for taking so much effort to try to understand me and my work. I wish I could write better and then I might be able to make some of it clearer. But I will continue to try to answer your questions as best as I can and to understand them as well.

To wit ... Well yes, actually, if I understand how you mean "maps," I would say that the Little People have experienced an evolution of their dwellings' architecture that has "mapped" their origin beliefs onto their evolving architectural forms (being born from the earth, considering the earth as a body, seeing architectural structures as bodies (the mythologies of their world which are expressed and recorded in the 3 films: "Birth," "Landscape-Body-Dwelling" and "Body-Earth"). What were originally sacred "body" informed parts of the landscape have been abstracted and evolved into architectural structures; "breast" landforms became domes etc.

To return to your art consciousness question. It is implicit (at least) that my thoughts about changing and expanding "art's" audience imply a redefinition of what art is, has been, should or could be in a culture ... a change in domain and purposes.

All my best.

Charles

September 10, 2011

Dear Charles,

You really have to tell me the story of *Mental Earth*. You evidently worked on it in Valencia. I think it is a remarkable piece, and certainly not street work. How much did Valencia inflect it?

Arthur

»» ««

September 10, 2011

Dear Arthur,

From the beginning, part of my story in my work has been the search for the most "primitive, primordial" ("thoughtless") gesture that would be the corollary to my (symbolically) most "primitive" and "primordial" material: clay. ("Body-Earth" is an attempt to use my body to create forms and gestures in clay, for example). This issue upon which is then exercised from the very origins, my imagination (fantasy) as to inventing a world, an ethos and religion ("Birth," etc), then implicitly a politics and sociological explorations and provocations that develop and elucidate it has part of its origins in my mother's career and research............

On the one hand, like *Smear* (a work at IVAM) *Mental Earth* attempts to try to capture the most primitive of gestures ... the smear, as in a child's thoughtless smears (implicitly of its feces) but here in space, not on a surface, not connected to an architectonic reality of time and place, but as the equivalent of a "daydream" in space; the psychological space created by laying down and hypnagogically seeing something in one's mind's space. It is an attempt to allow then "glimpses" of fantasy disengaged from narrative and particularly from the linear narrative odysseys of the Little People. All in all this work and other recent ones have served to allow me to explore my own psyche in a less coherent and didactic way ... (for myself and others), not requiring a coherent story, but providing an arena that allows me to engage in a free form my own horror vacui onto a material.

All my very best,

Charles

September 11, 2011

Dear Arthur,

Just to add another note to the below. You will find in the IVAM book under my "artist's statements" a copy of my statement from the catalogue of my Castelli show entitled "House Plants and Rocks"... which begins "Did anybody ever think an egg" ... [see transcript following]: this statement follows a similar methodology as that which I've used re clay and mind (fantasy) and applies it to body (as first home) and architecture i.e. when does consciousness and then, culture, style etc intrude on biology and instinct as regards making home and shelter. See also other IVAM statement re Caddisfly larvae and "large brained architects" from Artforum [see transcript following]. The issue of arriving back to primaries is in both of them pretty much the same for me analytically. See also Ice House (Instant House), lowa 1980, page reference 107, Navarra Catalogue (could provide a photo for printed reference), page 158 IVAM catalogue.

Best, CS

»» ««

September 11, 2011

Dear Charles,

I would never in a million years have gotten the iconography of *Mental Earth* without it being told to me.

Thanks for all the help!

Arthur



Ice House (Instant House), Iowa City, Iowa, 1980

#### **ARTIST'S STATEMENTS**

For the man in the street, bricks are still only good for making houses, no matter how self-righteously they lie on the floor. However great, ethical art itself does not make an ethical world. We are all part rogue, saint, hunter and victim.

I've learned more in the street from and given more to Josefa (Paris), Cucho and Hollywood (Lower East Side) and Mendelez (Berlin) than from or to the artworldly.

And I've learned more from watching the small-brained genius of the Caddisfly larva building its house by attaching blade after blade in an ascending spiral around its body as it grows than by studying the works of large-brained architects.

I've always thought of my work as transsocial, transpolitical, transsexual and transparent(al).

I see a relationship between the rehabilitation of building shells through Sweat Equity and the hermit crab's primal mode of reinhabiting abandoned shells. Only when we can envision the sun rising on our transparent plastic plumbing and when we are able to realize how we devour our lovers in the act of mating will we love the person in the street as much as we love our own vainglorious art.

- Charles Simonds

From "Situation Esthetics: Impermanent Art and the Seventies Audience," *Artforum* 18, no. 5 (January 1980) pages 22–29.

Did anybody ever think an egg?
Do nests have style?
Is there a thoughtless house?
Who made the first dwelling?
Is a home a living place?
When is a house a home?

These works are wilted ruins, sprouting towers, body rock plant hills, stumps, smears, buds and floral sprays.

They are living places.

- Charles Simonds

## AFTERWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Knoedler is proud and honored to present this exhibition of recent and new work by Charles Simonds. As Arthur Danto concludes in his fine essay for this catalogue, "Charles Simonds is a singularly original figure in contemporary art." I might add that, not unlike his work itself, Simonds has been, for many, an artist "hidden in plain sight," yet one who has significantly challenged and changed the very nature of art in our time.

We owe a debt of gratitude to David Anfam, for introducing us to the artist. Together with David, and in her own inimitable style, Edye Weissler, Knoedler Librarian and Archivist, helped the gallery find its way to Charles and to make this exhibition possible. Ben Barzune, my longstanding colleague and Knoedler Associate Director, worked closely with Charles, with diligence and passion, to give the exhibition its framework and shape. Ben has been a guiding force in all aspects of its organization.

Our thanks to Alain Mousseigne and Valentin Rodriguez, at Les Abattoirs, Art Moderne et Contemporain, in Toulouse, for their support of the original idea conceived for this exhibition. I remain hopeful that, one day, *Fellow Travelers: Charles Simonds and Artists from the Daniel Cordier Collection* will be realized.

I am grateful for the opportunity, once again, to enjoy the collaboration of esteemed philosopher and writer Arthur Danto, whose thinking is so uniquely illuminating, and whose presence is always so human.

For the combined excellence and refinement of their respective crafts, my thanks, as always, to graphic designer, Leslie Miller, The Grenfell Press, and to printer Massimo Tonolli and his staff, at Trifolio. We add our thanks, as well, to Charles' assistant, Dana Michele Hemes.

This exhibition culminates the many years that Knoedler has called 19 East 70th Street its home. At this momentous juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all of my Knoedler colleagues for their dedicated work; each has contributed in meaningful ways to the realization of this project. Finally, my thanks to Knoedler's Chairman, Michael A. Hammer, for his ongoing support.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

# CHARLES SIMONDS MENTAL EARTH GROWTHS AND SMEARS

November 3, 2011-January 14, 2012

Knoedler & Company 19 East 70 Street New York, New York 10021 Tel 212 794-0550 Fax 212 772-6932 www.knoedlergallery.com

Catalogue designed by The Grenfell Press, New York Printed by Trifolio, Verona, Italy

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Frontispiece: *Life, With Thorns*, 2011, porcelain, 13 x 21 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches Created at Manufacture Nationale de Céramique, Sèvres, France

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Published in an edition of 1800

ISBN 978-0-615-53671-2

Charles Simonds would like thank Dana Michele Hemes for her help in preparing the exhibition, and Jean-Pierre Blanzat, François and Dominik Combot, for their help with the works produced at Sèvres.

