"Destruction has no place in society—it belongs to our dreams; it belongs to art." —Ralph Ortiz

Introduction

The startling work of Rafael Montañez Ortiz (Ralph Ortiz) demands a response from the viewer. It questions the traditional definitions of art, and encourages argumentation. In fact, from the onset of his artistic career, Ortiz has frequently performed in public, eliciting and incorporating audience participation even when it involved vigorous dissent.

In the galleries, the viewer is confronted with the Archaeological Finds in which furniture—often his own, often furniture donated by friends, always in perfect condition—is destroyed by Ortiz. One can also find the remains, and listen to a recording of a Piano Concert that the artist has performed with a hatchet in hand. Colorful and festive feather constructions on the floor and walls compel the viewer to imagine rituals of ancient cultures, while the use of audiovisual equipment and electronic media brings the viewer face to face with newly found venues for artistic endeavor.

Rafael Montañez Ortiz’s commitment to the interaction with the audience does not end with the creation and presentation of his art, nonetheless. A professional educator, he has taught art in elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. He has been teaching in the university for the last sixteen years. It was in fact while working with the Board of Education in New York City (High School of Music and Art) that Ortiz was appointed as the first director of his proposed cultural project for the Barrio, which he called El Museo del Barrio. It was a project then affiliated with Public School District offices. In an interview published by Art in America in 1971 (see the Annotated Bibliography in this catalogue), the museum director/artist explained that he had experienced cultural disenfranchisement which had lead him to search for a way to authenticate his ethnic experience. He saw El Museo del Barrio as a “practical alternative to the orthodox museum” which he hoped would facilitate the revival of “living values” and thereby personalize cultural experience.

It is particularly meaningful for this institution, thus, to present a comprehensive exhibition of the work of Rafael Montañez Ortiz. Neither his important contributions to the avant-garde in the sixties and early seventies, when he was known as Ralph Ortiz, nor his more recent artistic production, have been explored in any depth within a public context. It is appropriate for El Museo del Barrio to examine this unconventional body of work within the larger picture of the visual arts in the second half of the twentieth century.

Ortiz, who was extremely prolific through the sixties, early on gained the recognition of both the avant-garde community and the established collectors. Along with many experimental artists, including Al Hansen, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, Günter Brus, and Wolf Vostell, Ortiz participated in the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) 1966, held in London. From as early as 1963, his work entered important public and private collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the de Menil Collection in Texas. In his early work, Ortiz explored violence and destruction as a creative force. He compared art with a dream “that cannot be censored.” Throughout his career he has continued to experiment and re-define his role as an artist. He sees the artist as a catalyst, as an educator, as a shaman or medicine-man who can, and should, transform and cure the illnesses in our society.

Rafael Montañez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche, 1960-1988 would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and organizations. First and foremost, the Museum Aid Program at the New York State Council on the Arts provided the funds for the exhibition and catalogue. Dr. Kristine Stiles not only wrote a comprehensive essay on Mr. Montañez Ortiz’s oeuvre, she also compiled a valuable annotated bibliography. Furthermore, she was a generous collaborator, providing us with essential documents and information. Papo Colo, Jeanette Ingberman, and the staff at Exit Art designed and produced this catalogue. Their unique creativity and sensitivity in dealing with nontraditional art, is matched by their unflagging enthusiasm and serious commitment to contemporary art. Visual artist José Morales resolved the difficulties in installing unusual pieces, and assisted the artist in recreating the Destruction Art Room.

Rafael Colón-Morales, Curator, and Carlos Ortiz-Chévres, Registrar of El Museo del Barrio organized and coordinated the exhibition with great care and vision. We are particularly grateful to the private and public collections that made their pieces available to our museum. Finally, we are grateful to Rafael Montañez Ortiz, the primary source, and a willing collaborator.

Petra Barreras del Rio
Executive Director
Introduction

Some thirty-five years ago, Rafael Ortiz began to construct a theory and practice which could account for his belief in the healing potential of imagination and its relationship to physical, psychic, and social pain. A continuous line of development connects his first destructions of found materials (1959-63), his destroyed furniture works, the Archaeological Finds (1961-67), with his first of many manifestos—Destructivism: A Manifesto (c. 1962)—his Destruction Ritual Realizations (1965-70), and his Physico-Psycho-Acromy (1973 to the present). Already in the late 1950s but before he articulated his theory of “art as behavior” and the artist as “the art material, the work of art in progress,” he understood that physical and psychic processes held the key to the creation of an authentic Self and therefore an authentic art of quality and value. In his quest for the authentic, he also confirmed the necessity to conquer the spurious and he identified the phenomena of destruction as a key factor in unlocking the concealed truth of negative traditions which shape public and private behavior and which are masked behind the faces of conventions, morality, and culture.

In this pursuit, Ortiz perceived that the body in its physical and psychic dimensions remained the container of the existential crisis as well as the principle metaphor of the historical suffering threatened by Armageddon. He appreciated that the human body plays a decisive role in the life-denying character of nihilism but that it also held the potential for a genuine renewal. In this sense, much as in Eastern philosophies, Ortiz conceived of the mind-body unity as an achievement rather than an essential relationship. From the beginning, Ortiz appropriated the imponderable enigma of life and death, shaped as they are by Eros—the sheer ecstasy of Being—and Thanatos—the will to death.

In his early twenties, in the late 1950s, Ortiz deduced that destruction and its synthesis in art had been neglected in the etiology of creation. In precisely the same period and similar to the eminent French philosopher Jacques Derrida who, in philosophy, began to examine the dichotomous structure of polarities which shape Western concepts and patterns of thought, Ortiz, in art, began to examine the obscure and taboo face of creative destruction. Isolating the instruments of his trade—speech and writing—Derrida explored such polarities as good/evil, being/thinglessness, presence/absence, truth/error, identity/difference, mind/matter, man/woman, life/death, nature/culture.1 As an artist, Ortiz selected the dichotomy of creation/destruction as the structure within which to explore the realities of his experience, an experience that, because of the polarities which had shaped his life directly—white/black, rich/poor, dominant/minority, mind/body, man/woman—led him to feel unauthentic.

Like Derrida, Ortiz noticed that the second term in each pair had been cast by society as spurious. For Ortiz this meant that black, poor, minority, body, and woman represented the negative, corrupt, and undesirable version of the first; in other words, a fall from the ideal. Oversized (6’5”) and lanky, sensual, dark-skinned, and poor, a Puerto Rican raised with all the repressive sexual conflicts inherent in Catholicism, Ortiz sensed himself to be the embodiment of everything that signified the fall from perfection. In the shadows of the glow of white, rich, majority, male presence, of mind over body, Ortiz represented an erotic body, an existence proportionately in error, a distortion of the dominant truths, a defilement of white, a default from rich; man—to be sure—not woman, but man so imperfectly cast in terms of the prevailing values as to be ashamed of the supremacy of that gender in the hierarchy of power. And yet, before the mirror, as if in defiance of social consensus, stood an exigent presence processing physical beauty and intellect—a contradiction to culture: a man in conflict.

In her unparalleled study, The Body in Pain (1985), Elaine Scarry pointed out that “physical pain is exceptional in the whole fabric of psychic, somatic, and perceptual states” for being “the only state that has no object.” Ortiz launched an extraordinary effort to objectify pain and to endure suffering with an aesthetic, humanized, and social voice. He collapsed his own social anguish into the work of art to unite the otherwise absent presence of destruction in life with the creative process. His art is not, however, a solitary narcissistic struggle. Rather, his work assumed the form of an analysis, a considered discourse and identification of the polemic signifying forces of destruction and creation within personal experience, culture, and society. His heroic effort to clarify destruction in contemporary life through the creative act was matched by a handful of the most controversial, complex, and serious artists throughout the world.2 Like them, he sought a comprehensive reappraisal of the ability of art to constructively affect social intercourse in the atomic age.

Ortiz began his public career as an artist in the early 1960s and although he has received widespread international attention in the popular media, he has been neglected by historians, vilified by the public, and treated with skepticism by artists. His utilization of the taboo language of violence earned him the neglect awarded most iconoclasts and visionaries. Nevertheless, long before Derrida’s deconstructionism became radical chic in academic circles and both establishment and marginal
criticism, years before "picture theory" and its offspring, "critical photography," exploited French philosophy and Marxism, a decade before neo art signs marketed as "political art and criticism" earned their makers a comfortable living, Ortiz had arrived at an inherently political aesthetic position and was unselfconsciously, and without the support of institutional and peer authorization, investigating the false oppositions, hierarchical orders, and emotional and sexual conflicts which give rise to our current condition. His destruction theory, objects, and rituals are attempts to found a critical diagnosis of the heteronomy and unauthenticity of the Self in contemporary history. They led to his present Physio-Psychology, a theory and ritual developed both as a meditation on the hidden ontology of Being and a means by which an integration of Self might be achieved through a phenomenology and philosophy of the Body as the material being of art.

I.

In 1952, Ortiz began to read depth psychology during a contracted episode of pleurisy from which he convalesced for six months when he was eighteen years old. There followed an extensive period of research on Freud's concepts of the unconscious and its effects on behavior which introduced Ortiz to the psychological dimension of destruction and violence in private and public life. A voracious reader, he also explored philosophy and was especially drawn to the combination of radical individualism, commitment to social responsibility, and exploration of the nature of Being represented in the metaphysical and existentialist philosophy of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. In anthropology the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss stand out in his memory and in sociology he was particularly moved by Norman O. Brown's Life Against Death (1959) for Brown's interpretation of Freud's speculations on the separation of self and culture. In economic theory, Marx and Engels spoke directly to his experience as a Puerto Rican American. Research, reading, study, and writing have always been key elements in Ortiz's artistic process. In the late 1950s, in search of alternatives to Western culture, he also spent hours in the New York Museum of Natural History researching the traditional rituals of non-Western societies. The amalgamation of races and ethnic cultures comprising his own Puerto Rican heritage compelled Ortiz the most. They included Arabic roots in North Africa and the Yacai Indians of Mexico as well as northern Spain, Portugal, France, and Ireland.

Painting in an Abstract Expressionist style in the late 1950s, Ortiz remembered probing through layers of surface paint as if to unearth a conscious and unconscious past. Between 1959 and 1961, he jotted down notes for what would eventually solidify as his Destructivism: A Manifesto, c. 1961-62, during the period when he also first destroyed furniture and ubiquitously titled these works Archaeological Finds. The leap from construction of a painting to destruction of an object occurred--as is often the instance--with the observation of an accident.

After laying a paint brush loaded with pigment on a pile of paint-soaked paper towels, he picked up his brush, stuck with paint, and it pulled away layers of the stack of papers. He could observe the hidden interior of the stack and he acknowledged that his expressive painting had been an historical quotation of Abstract Expressionism but that the excavation of the paper towels was the kernel for a more personal art. In addition, the psycho-sexual imagery and erotic connotations he pursued in his paintings became more direct as he began to work through mounds of the paper towels, which he stapled to large boards. Cleaning his brushes on the surface, he dug in, laid bare, revealed the concealed, and from these ready-made materials, he created what he considered "anti-paintings." Ortiz carefully laid down edge-to-edge in a geometric grid pattern brown paper towels of the variety found in gas stations and high school bathroom vending machines during the early 1960s before richly staining and soaking the surfaces. The resulting works, whose color and material have continued to deteriorate over time, appear as dark mirror images, light absorbing interiors, of the gold leaf monochrome paintings of Yves Klein done in the same year. The other side of Klein's vision, Ortiz's "anti-paintings" suggest an alchemical swallowing, destruction, and rejection of the glittering, pristine, commercial reflecting surfaces of the Klein monochromes. This action constituted his initial leap into the first phase of his Destruction Art, the construction-destruction phase. The discovery led to a feverish period in which he worked with all kinds of materials, burning through layers of magazines, piling up groups of objects all to be destroyed--paper cups, candles, flower pots, and assemblages of food into which he drove spikes (violent metaphors for the sexual act). He considered these works "experiments" in order to escape the confining demands of "art" and to gain a certain freedom from art as something made--an object constructed.

While sitting on his favorite meditation cushion in his studio, a cushion already in a state of deterioration, Ortiz realized that he might confine his destructive process to a unified form. This way he could avoid assembling multiples and still have a complex object comprised of different materials which retained a kind of animistic history, "the spirit of people," with its continuous and close proximity to the body. The juxtaposition of body and object also animated the sexual connotations he hoped to arouse in his art. The destroyed cushion became the first in the numbered series of Archaeological Finds which, he felt, better expressed the chaotic psychic processes of the Id and the erotically charged discourse associated with Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction from whom the kundalini erotic energies issue to become intellectual and/or transcendental capacities. The destruction process then created a bridge between his intellectual sources and his erotic, emotional energies.

During this period, Ortiz read art periodicals voraciously and noticed his affinity for the Nouveaux Réalistes, whose use of urban refuse matched his own...
social and philosophical concerns. The destructive elements which Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle introduced into their constructed assemblages resonated for him, but Cesar’s crushed automobiles and Arman’s use of destructive process impressed him more for they were created works bereft of the constructive element still present in Tinguely and de Saint Phalle’s work. Arman and Cesar had found a more immediate process of de-
struction/creation, which he sought in his own art. More importantly, all these works supported Ortiz’s move away from construction-destruction towards pure de-
structive process.

By late 1961, early 1962, he had begun to destroy mat-
tresses and chairs—his earliest Archaeological Finds—spraying the results of his destructive-action with a fixative resin. Indeed, this attack on the ready-made, his
delving into, burrowing through, ripping apart, exposing,
and reordering the ready-made represented a personal dialoguewith the history of technology and its impact on
the arts. By working with the ready-made, Ortiz could
also enter the art historical discourse initiated by Marcel Duchamp whose urinal, the Fountain (1917), literally
attacked the very bowels of art by challenging the sanctity
of the unique object. In his dialogue with Duchamp, Ortiz
bowed to Duchamp’s unprecedented identification of the
authority of the mass-produced object over the hand-
crafted object in the modern era. But, Ortiz simultane-
ously asserted his own intellect and willful disordering
process upon the ready-made by deconstructing the in-
dustrial object in order to divest it of a false unity and
thereby reveal the multitude of materials and parts which
together form that object. Through his destruction, then,
Ortiz affirmed the preeminence of individual creation
concealed within the ready-made object—that obscured
presence, the anonymous hand, the diligent designer
contained within the technology of the ready-made and
the industry of the multiple.

Richard Halsey/beck, former Berlin Dadaist who
practiced psychiatry in New York under the pseudonym
Dr. Charles Hulbeck, was impressed by Ortiz’s Archaeo-
logical Finds. He had been introduced to Ortiz’s work by
Peter Selz, then curator of painting and sculpture at the
Museum of Modern Art who had visited Ortiz’s Coney Island studio. Halsey/beck wrote that Ortiz’s destruction
works signified “a new space concept” which expressed
an existential dimension of “truth in our time”:

Ralph Ortiz… is fascinated by things that are not or are
not yet. Now, to do things that are not yet does not mean that you stop half-ways; it may also mean that
you do things first in a completed form and then put
them into a shape where they are not or are not yet. This
is exactly what Ralph Ortiz does. His sculptures are
things that are not anymore, they may have had a
completion, a full rounded vitality but as they are
presented to us they want to impress us with something
totally different, namely with the experience of de-
struction. To destroy things means really to create
them anew in the sense of space … by taking some-
thing away from his objects. It is the opposite of the
machine completed object, the thing that has lost itself
while entering our perception or a thing that was torn
up by time or some aggressive forces undefinable.

When Ralph Ortiz wants to show us a mattress he does
not show a mattress but an object that is torn up by
undefinable forces as they worked in time. There is an
impact of hostility but also an impact of a new concept
of time and space, whether it is a mattress or flower-pots or anything, the material really is not
playing any important role. What really plays an
important role is the artist’s thought of the man behind
the mattress who has to fight his way through the
jungle of his existence. Ralph Ortiz is an existential
sculptor and I think one of the most important ones
because he is committed to some truth about ourselves
in our time.6

The truth-seeking ceremonies and practices of traditional cultures which Ortiz had researched provided him with
an important bridge between his destroyed objects and his
Destruction Realizations begun in 1966.7 He had scruti-
nized the sacrificial practices of Mesoamericans and
studied ancient Greek and Etruscan ritual divination in
the early 1960s. At that time, he began to see that the
activity of deconstructing the article of furniture was
already a performance, for people often gathered at the
open door of his studio in Coney Island to watch him
at work.

His awareness of the performative aspect of his de-
structive process converged with his effort to probe into
the surface of materials and his desire to unearth and make
conscious the unconscious psychological components of
experience. The concurrence of these interests coincided
with contemporary developments in painting and sculp-
ture about which his friend, Al Hansen, told him. Hansen
described his own and other artists’ Happenings and
Fluxus activities and, although Ortiz was extremely inter-
ested in the extension of action painting into the event-
structure of the Happening and Fluxus works, he con-
cluded that this work failed to address the essential
existential issues which it raised. He remembered:

Generally speaking, the people who were involved in
Happenings in the late 1950s, didn’t really go to the
source … I saw people playing a lot of games in art.
The people that were very serious were not in art, they
were in the streets. They were protesting wars, all
kinds of social injustice, racism, and later sexism.

What I am saying is that the artist seemed to be isolated
from the realities in the civilization, in the society, and
was caught up in the very isolated notion of what art
was about, its role, and the role of the artist…. So it
became clear to me that … the artist was playing some
kind of weird tragic role like the court jester.

Unwilling to detach himself from social, psychological,
racial, and sexual problems, Ortiz remained attentive to
the dilemmas of his period, believing that:

The artist has to take responsibility for not taking
responsibility, for not recognizing the role of the artist
Within the civilization... within the culture. Art, as it operates in the culture now, simply contributes to the madness that exists, to the inability for people to be sensitive to life....

In a formal sense, the happenings in psychology and anthropology, more than the Happenings or Fluxus events of other artists, compelled Ortiz to expand his art into actions. For in action, he might unite his excavatory process in the unconscious and his research into exotic rituals, the unconscious and his research into exotic rituals.

Once he understood his next step, he struggled to implement a sacred ritual space similar to what Octavio Paz later described as the "platform-theater-sacred sanctuary" of the Aztec pyramid in which ceremonial rites of creative destruction--the double face of a single conception--took place. This sacred space symbolized the purpose of the universe, "the point of convergence of the human world and the divine" where life and death rituals projected the image of the world of human society and its impetus and life-destroying sacrificial acts to secure the continuity of human and cosmological time. Paz explained that while creation and destruction are antithetical notions in contemporary terms, traditional cultures often experienced them as identical and he pointed out that the Aztecs demonstrated how the gods create, destroy, and sometimes, destroy themselves after their self-immolation they reembodied the world. The game of the gods is a bloody game culminating in a sacrifice that is the creation of the world. The creative destruction of the gods is the means by which the gods' rites, ceremonies, and fiestas sacrifice is equal to productive destruction.

Several years elapsed before Ortiz actually created a destruction ritual through about 1963, while gathering old furniture in a junk yard, he found a piano and destroyed it on the spot. Without considering this action in the context of art, Ortiz was aware, nevertheless, that the sounds which issued from the instrument during its destruction were compelling "lower chakras" sounds evoking powerful emotional and physical responses. That same year, while taking a filmmaking class for his major at Pratt Institute, he made Henry Penny, a movie filmed in a chicken slaughterhouse. In the spring of 1966, he received an invitation to attend the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in London where he actually participated in his first public Destruction Realizations. Prior to his participation in DIAS, Ortiz had never created a public event and his 1965 Chair Destruction had been staged solely for the purpose of creating a photographic image.

Once in London, in the heady atmosphere of an international gathering of artists, poets, musicians, and psychoanalysts, the media exploited the artists' every action with unabashed glee, Ortiz responded as if he had entered the Olympics, competing with fervor to "win the gold." Within the space of a month and although he had not previously had the public acclaim he realized no less than seven events: two Chair Destruction Rituals, one Mother Piano Destruction Concert, two Piano Decoration Concerts, two Paper Bag Decoration Concerts, a Self-Destruction realization.

In addition, he screened his chicken slaughterhouse film, Henry Penny, as well as several Destruction Film which he had prepared in New York. (Among these is a film of found-footage into which he punched holes such that the film looped through the screening apparatus an exceedingly disturbing flicker sensation of moving images was experienced.)

His first action took place just following the first DIAS press conference at St. Bride's Institute, August 31, 1966. Leading the procession and the other ritual away and I swung the Ortiz approached a member of the club who was sitting in a chair, reading. He informed the man that he needed the chair and that the chair belonged to him. When the manager of the club confirmed Ortiz's ownership (he had purchased it a day earlier from the manager), the man left the chair and Ortiz instantaneously leap into it, and with his bare hands, began to systematically tear it to shreds. The sound was so horrid that it was carefully de-stroayed; it wasn't slow but it wasn't frenzied.

When the destruction of the piano was complete, the BBC staff informed Ortiz that he had mistakenly demolished the wrong piano, indeed, a valuable and perfectly tuned instrument. This did not concern Ortiz. On the contrary, he explained:

"I was delivered because it affirmed the preciousness of the object. In our culture objects are more important than people. No one ran out and said anything about Harvey. It was the piano that concerned everyone."

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milk. Then I slap the puddle of vomit angrily over and over calling, "Mommy, Mommy." Accepting the puddle of milk as symbolic of Mommy, I calm down. Then I crawl off. "Mommy, ma."

Many people who witnessed Ortiz's actions in London were repulsed. He presented the quintessential "ugly," brush, arrogant, and undisciplined American, acting out personal neuroses. Ortiz cultivated these perceptions and admitted that he "sometimes co-operated in the ... more sensual language of the media," even "pandering to people's fantasies" in order to whip up attention to his work and, in the process, reveal the very phenomena he was metaphorically describing in his work. He had read Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964) and he realized that:

One's Being is defined by one's behavior. The whole idea of cultural ritual and the football game that McLuhan put his finger on, all early cultures were fully aware of.

The superficial coarseness of Ortiz's action did not alienate everyone who witnessed his Self-Destruction. The British artist, Graham Stevens, one of the youngest participants in DIAS who later became an international authority on air and water structures, founding member of the British International Solar Energy Society in 1974, and energy and solar consultant to such countries as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Uganda, recalled Ortiz's Self-Destruction and considered it an important expression. Stevens vividly remembered being "amazed rather than shocked."

He continued:

I was amazed by the practical ability to perform and vomit. The ability to do the event. I wasn't horrified at what he was doing. I didn't think it was morally wrong. In fact, it was a valid expression.³³

Four years after Ortiz's Self-Destruction, Arthur Janov, a psychologist and psychiatric social worker, published his "Primal Scream"³⁴ theory. He opened his introduction with an account that a patient had given him of Ortiz's London action. His patient had demanded Janov's help in reenacting crucial early experiences much in the manner Ortiz had enacted primary oral experiences. Janov explained that the story of Ortiz's action "changed the course of my professional life."

Janov's work was centered on Primal Scream popularized Otto Rank's notion of the birth trauma (The Trauma of Birth, 1929) and Jacob Moreno's work on psychodrama (Who Shall Survive, 1953). Ortiz had familiarized himself with both Rank and Moreno's work in the late 1950s. When asked about the popularization of his artistic action, Ortiz expressed pleasure at the direct connection to pop-psychology. He pointed out that his art sought to expose the pervasive presence of emotional problems in society and that the basic popularity of Janov's theory provided a social vindication of the hypothetical and theoretical underpinnings of his art action. "Pop-psychoanalysis explains more about society than art does," Ortiz observed, and concluded that his research into psychology and shamanism—the priest-doctor who uses magic to cure the sick, to divine the hidden, and to control events that affect the welfare of the people—had come full circle.

Ortiz believed that he had "trained" as a shaman in order to become the one who understands the mysteries and leads the initiates. His training had taken place during long hours of research and experimentation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Perhaps more important than the intellectual work he had undertaken, his experience in American society had prepared him best to understand the complex, damaging, and enlightening physical and psychological ritual dimensions hidden in culture. As a child he had served as an altar boy, first in the Catholic church and later in the high Episcopal church. He had served as a "shaman" boy responsible for turning on the lights in an Orthodox Jewish temple where he had watched rehearsals for high services and listened to the cantoring with fascination. Also as a boy, he led other children in symbolic burials of dead pets, painting and decorating empty Velveretta cheese boxes as caskets and making and painting miniature crosses. In pre-adolescence he had been one of the leading members of a social group, the El Rays, a group of Irish and Italian youths on the Lower East Side of Manhattan who had jackets made with their club name on the back and who together mastered the rites of adolescence: shooting pool, talking to girls, dancing, playing basketball, and being a regular "gay." Ortiz was also the school "artist" with a crew of helpers charged with decorating the blackboards and bulletin boards each holiday with turkeys, rabbits, pictures of George Washington, and the like. His sumterites were spent with his cousin in East Harlem and there he witnessed the rough and violent gang-action of such groups as the Commanches and the Turbans, whose gang names he recalled vividly because he remembered "running for his life."

Another important experience in his "training" as shaman occurred during the late 1950s when he was still a student of architecture. At this time, as research for a speech on Indian peyote cults in Mexico which he prepared for a class in rhetoric, Ortiz experimented with peyote—then still a legal substance. He experienced Gods, Devils, Visions, and exposed himself to a radically different pattern of imaging which never left him, although he never returned to the use of drugs. Most importantly, the peyote experience indoctrinated him in the actual world of the shaman and lived states of the dream. Thereafter, he sought to find a means to make conscious the dreaming state. Later, the function of the dream, along with breathing, became fundamental aspects of his Physio-Psych-Alchemy.

I have written elsewhere that the traditional notion of "shaman" must be re-analyzed in contemporary terms according to the needs of society.³⁵ I have also noted that the best artists working in events have proven repeatedly that the physical, psychic, and emotional tenor of the artist's individual character are as much a part of the art of action as paint, canvas, stone, metal, or wood are in painting and sculpture. Who is that person "is—his or her very Being—fundamentally dictates the quality of the art ac-
In other words, the artist has become a human being in the world, his/her personal growth and power to create, express, and convey symbolic information are the evidence of the shaman today. The quality of the artist’s very Being is the evidence of his/her knowledge of the mysteries of the baffling, cacophonous present in which the struggle for authentic identity takes place in a sea of media images, an ocean of conflicting information, a clash of values, and a general revaluation of all values. In order for the concept and function of shamanism to have relevant contemporary meaning, one must examine what social, ethnic, racial, cultural, and political circumstances have contributed to a certain individual’s ability to accrue fluent and powerful communicative capabilities—especially in electronically mediated Western society where few persons invest belief in the individual and at the same time hold up the individual as the ideal. This is precisely what Ortiz had done.


The Life and Death of Henry Penny took place in New York at the Ecco Homo Gallery run by Ferdy Buanoano. A woman, dressed and costed to Ortiz’s concept of an “upper-class debutante type,” stood in the space draped in a bedspread resembling a long gown.5 She softly uttered “Daddy” in various tones and modulations. Ortiz was positioned under the bedspread with an air pump attached to a contact microphone. As the woman continued to softly and expressively repeat the word “Daddy,” Ortiz began to blow up a balloon which had been attached to her dress at the belly so that as it expanded, she appeared to become pregnant. When the balloon reached its maximum expansion, it exploded and the pumping sound and explosion, amplified by the microphones, ceased. Ortiz emerged slowly from under her drape holding a chicken representing the birth. He ritualistically showed the chicken to the gathered public and walked to a slight platform in the room (a platform-theater-sanctuary) where he tied the chicken by the feet and began to slowly swing it over the audience and out into the room. As the swinging increased, he picked up shears and pushed the swinging bird with the sheers. Suddenly, as the bird swung back to him, he snipped the neck and the bird’s head fell to the floor. The entire scene, he continued the single word uttered by the woman: “Daddy.” But his pronouncements were angry, hostile, and aggressive, not seductive as hers had been. He then picked up the bloody, dead chicken carcass, and beat it to shades a Flamenco guitar which had been placed on the stage. During the guitar smashing and destruction, he uttered the word “Mommie.” He then picked up the head, slipped it into his fly where he had previously fastened a plastic bag to hold it, and walked out of the space.

In Henry Penny Piano Destruction Concert with Paper Bag Destruction Concert, which took place in his studio (148 West 23rd Street, New York) in 1967, Ortiz used the principle elements he had used in The Life and Death of White Henry: the chicken destruction and an instrument (this time a piano). The use of the valuable musical instrument, whether piano or Flamenco guitar (recalling his father’s ancestry in Spain) was for Ortiz a vehicle for empathetically expressing, in an explosive way, “the crisis of life.” He recalled the moving, emotional sounds evoking feelings of anguish, desire, pain, and sorrow, when he had destroyed the piano in the junk yard during the early 1960s. He remembered the wailing sounds of the Orthodox Jews’ canting. His Piano Destruction Concerts were created to resonate, through waves of sound, the physical sensations and mental vibrations of sorrow at destruction, of pity at psychic suffering, of adversity, blight, disaster, and affliction, of collapse and failure, or the intense aching endurance of the denied, the abandoned, the forgotten, the neglected, the anxiety-ridden, the heartbroken and tormented, and finally the ruin that accompanies all destruction.

Henry Penny Piano Destruction Concert with Paper Bag Destruction began with people gathered and seated amidst Ortiz’s Archaeological Finds. Each person was given about fifty paper bags to blow up and explode, thereby exciting the nervous system. During the general delirium of this part of the event, a chicken was passed among the audience to fondle. When the people began throwing the bags one after another and a gentle pandemonium reigned, Ortiz collected the chicken and corn was handed out to the participants. Ortiz began to carefully and gently clean the piano with the live chicken whose body, when brushed along the keys, began the piano segment of the Destruction Concert, made even more poignant by the clucking chicken. Once the piano was cleared, the chicken was again handed back to the participants who, realizing that the moment had come for the chicken to be sacrificed, began to debate the demise of the animal. Ortiz once again took possession of the chicken and, with a single blow against the piano, slapped its neck. When the beast was dead, he began his piano destruction with an axe. At a certain point, he put the axe down, picked up the chicken carcass, and continued the destruction with the chicken, beating it against the harp of the piano. He completed the destruction ritual to the end with the axe.

In his search for a profound means by which to communicate the physical and psychological brutality of destruction and for a “more visceral way to relate to art,” Ortiz introduced the destruction of chickens into several of his rituals. The chicken has always been associated with folk culture, upon whose traditions and myths Ortiz drew heavily. He had witnessed his grandmother, during a natural part of the domestic process, kill chickens for food. He also laboriously studied Mexican Indian ritual chicken sacrifices. Because he wanted the destructive act to be emphasized over the killing of an animal, he selected an animal common to ritual sacrifice, folk tales, and folk
traditions, an animal which may be quickly killed and eaten, and which has been slaughtered by millions for millennia. In the 20th century, as a boy of eleven, Ortiz had worked in a chicken slaughterhouse under the Manhattan Bridge delivering the chickens to wholesale distribution houses. When criticized for using the chicken in the manner of an ancient sacrificial ritual no longer meaningful in contemporary culture, Ortiz explained that he had hoped to make "amazing bridges" to knowledge and understanding, to introduce "contradictions" to logic and contemporary culture. He did not simply remain a documentarian or a notator of the prevailing mores. "An artist must realize the existential dialogue," Ortiz continued. "Mine was a nihilist dialogue with the most powerful means and existential drama in the nihilist sense."

Ortiz’s aesthetic decision to use organic material in his art resembled aesthetic choices made by other artists working with destruction in art—significantly artists who had been, like Ortiz, brought up in the Catholic faith and/or who had suffered directly the actual choices and violence of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb. There is no coincidence that as the victim of violent racism in the United States, Ortiz shared with them the actual experience of destruction and the desire to reflect and combat the physical and psychological experience of that violation. In Austria, Hermann Nitsch began using the bloody, skinned carcass of a lamb in his Orgies Mysteries Theatre. As the crucified symbol of the origins of the mythical, like Ortiz, Nitsch lived in the idea of splitting the sacred and the profane in his actions, in the sense of the unconscious violence underlying the division of Western intellectual and spiritual traditions: the savage crucifixion of Christ; the legend of the ferocious, erotic, and paroxysmal Dionysian rites and mysteries; and the mixture of mourning, suffering, and sexual taboo in the collective guise of the Oedipus legend which informs Freudian psychoanalysis. Otto Muhld used foodstuff in his Materialaktionen (Materi­aktions) to deal with the excesses of industrial culture and human sexual and psychic abuse. In Japan, the artist Yoshio Shirakawa, a member of Hi Red Center, wrote...

In 1960, we no longer dream of creation. An atom bomb will come to resolve everything. The corvidae Picasso rousses us less than the blood of a cat being run over. The concept of an artistic activity serious artistic work. The only way to be spared from the massacre is to side with the assassins.13

In all of Ortiz’s rituals, he layered very specific themes: abortion, transcending national borders, the social and cultural and psychic effects of the trauma of the American Indian, the Chicano whose dream is to rebuild his/her understanding of a people, and of the destruction of the social and cultural fabric and of the individual's ability to understand and create himself as a social and psychological being. Ortiz planted ideas of theажьness and sexual oppression of the world, sexual conflicts over oral and anal intercourse, seduction, sexual exploitation, in short, all aspects of the body, aggression, depression, regression, sublimations, psycho­analytic disorders, cataonia. In all his Destruction Realizations, Ortiz sought to make transparent, to un­mask, and to help dissolve unconscious repressions—the anger of the son against the father, the incest, adultery, and heterosexualities of Western culture. In order to exercise the Oedipus and Electra of current experience.

In this pursuit, his violently disturbing destructions functioned similarly to the privileged instant identified by Georges Bataille in his reflections on the nature of the sacred.14 The privileged instant, Bataille has explained, is the act of making concrete a random moment. That moment which is insubstantial, seemingly ephemeral. Its emergence is held captive—privileged—a fleeting moment becomes infinite. In traditional painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, and music, the privileged instant appeared as an evanescent, continuous substantiation. In the attempt to "attain the sacred instant by its own resources," Bataille observed, traditional art stabilized the privileged instant, enslaved the sacred, and inevitably led to the disenchantment, misery, and ultimate death of art; for traditional art "did not have the force to attain the sacred instant by its own resources" precisely because it rendered the ungraspable substantial.15 The sacred resides in the privileged instant, which is only a moment of communional suffering. In the sacred, the spirit may break free but such a space may well be a field of violence in which no limitations can be conceded and the person stands "alone":

He suddenly has at his disposal all possible human conventions, and is living in an interpenetrating and intermingling chaos divine power… nor can try to know if this heritage will consume and destroy the one it consecrates. But he refuses now to surrender what possesses him to the standards of salesmen, to which art has conformed.16

Images of Ortiz’s Destruction Art, retrospectively viewed, stabilize the privileged instant of his symbolic projections of his values of his heritage. They represent the excesses of violence, suffering, and sexual taboo in the collective guise of the Oedipus legend which informs Freudian psychoanalysis. Ortiz’s work is a performance framed in a similar political context and utilizing similar elements: ten slaughtered chickens with heads and intimacies intact, 250 dressed white mice, 125 cases of blood, one thousand paper bags, one upright fully playable piano, a phonograph, a long playing recording of Spanish classical piano, ten pairs of scissors, thirty people, one long-handled single-blade four-pound axe, 400 paper cups. The space was divided into four twenty-foot-square performance areas and the piano and phonograph were painted white and placed in the central area. The stage was a wooden platform of about twelve-by-twelve feet and eighteen-inch-high fenced area in the rear center of the gallery. There were screens lowered for the projection of a brain lobotomy operation. There was a "laboratory" set up for the burning of clothing, another space for the smashing of chicken parts, ritual blood throwing, and clothes tearing. All areas except the lobotomy area were brightly lit.

Again the audience became initiatees and Ortiz selected six initiates to work with him in the destruction. The initiatees were given blood and told to throw it at the initiates performing the ritual in front of the chicken-fiend "From the cold to the room was forced to accept a live white mouse which she could allow to live or by releasing into the mouse trap area. The infant had begun with loud nonverbal yelling: AAAAAABBBB. Ortiz, realizing the ritual’s effect, realized the audience tearing feathers from chickens, throwing the feathers and he and the initiates attacked each other with the chicken flesh, the smell of chicken and the smell of blood. The initiatees, in a state of anxiety, fighting hostilely, identified with the mayhem of dismemberment, blood, mice, and screaming. Wails and clothes were covered with blood thrown by the initiatees, the initiates, and initiators, who had been joined by the balloon hidden under the woman’s clothing. She gave birth with a bang to a chickens. Ortiz approached the woman and took possession of the name of his mother for the work of Western civilization and the performance in "Kill the enemy." A Chicken Destruction Ritual was about to begin when suddenly a group of initiatees who had entered the space with the intention of saving the life of the animal (obviously, in the context of the performance of bloody Vietnam, the United States, and the Mexican revolution) Ortiz seized their opportunity to rescue the animal. A struggle ensued for the chicken between the initiatees, who were pledged to the realization of the ritual and the sacrifice of the chicken, and those who were against this action. Realizing that some people had taken the responsibility to save the life of the chicken and were willing to disturb the performance in the ritual, in the middle of the room, Ortiz decided to alter his behavior and fight with the intruders for the life of the chicken. Holding the animal, he ran out of the room, through the theater, out onto the campus in the snow and a chase commenced. Ortiz, followed by his interlocutors who at this point did not realize that the chicken was to be saved, in turn followed by the initiatees willing to sacrifice the animal, ran for his life and that of the animal. The experience ended nearly a half an hour later when Ortiz, exhausted, returned to the theater with the life of the chicken spared.

A Chicken Destruction Theater Ritual in Hollywood at the Ace Gallery in 1970 was a performance framed in a similar political context and utilizing similar elements: ten slaughtered chickens with heads and intimacies intact, 250 dressed white mice, 125 cases of blood, one thousand paper bags, one upright fully playable piano, a phonograph, a long playing recording of Spanish classical piano, ten pairs of scissors, thirty people, one long-handled single-blade four-pound axe, 400 paper cups. The space was divided into four twenty-foot-square performance areas and the piano and phonograph were painted white and placed in the central area. The stage was a wooden platform of about twelve-by-twelve feet and eighteen-inch-high fenced area in the rear center of the gallery. There were screens lowered for the projection of a brain lobotomy operation. There was a "laboratory" set up for the burning of clothing, another space for the smashing of chicken parts, ritual blood throwing, and clothes tearing. All areas except the lobotomy area were brightly lit.

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Kurt von Meier, an art critic and art historian then working in Los Angeles. At a certain point, a cue was given to begin to kick, bang, and pound the walls for two minutes until another cue, given by Ortiz, signaled a quiet, a "catatonic stance." Ortiz wrote:

We took grotesque anguished poses—blood-dripping from my torn clothing. I left the ragged bloody stouter. As I made my way through the crowd of initiates, I thought of the difficulty the initiators would have holding the grotesque poses until I completed the Piano Destruction Concert and returned to them with the live white mice for the Mouse Trap Event. As I passed the Sheet Burner I felt a sense of failure. I couldn’t smell the burning of fabric … I shouted “Make a fire god damn it.” The Lobotomy was moving along well, lobes after bloody lobes all away under the cutting hands of the initiate surgeon. The slide projection of the human brain was in bloody living color, an awesome huge convoluted myth of a brain being slowly sliced to the floor...

As Ortiz passed the phonograph with the Spanish piano music playing, he picked up an axe on his way to the piano and smashed the phonograph, and then began to work on the piano. Blood was thrown on the piano, “sacrfying the carcasse.” Ortiz followed this action by picking up a box of the live mice, handing them to his initiators, and together they let the mice free in the mouse trap arena. Crying and whining their hands on the walls, clapping, they frightened the mice which ran in all directions and into the traps, some of which had already been snapped by mice set in the arena by initiators who had earlier entered the space. A man jumped into the area and began rescuing the mice with both hands, at the same time setting off as many of the lethal traps as possible with his feet, and the Destruction Ritual came to an end in the “murder, blood, gore, and cruelty” Ortiz had intended.

Considerable creative energy during recent years has been devoted to the healing function of art in society and many intellectuels have arrived at positions not similar to the aims Ortiz outlined for his Destruction Art in the mid-1960s. For example, in 1983, writing on what he identified as the "destruction of the human spirit in the context of nuclear war," the social psychologist Steven Kall described the tendency in Western culture to literaryize psychological needs in actual conflicts. This need to enact conflicts in real social events as such was another contrast to societies. Kall explained, where highly developed mythic and ritual practices present primary contexts for addressing psychological needs. Kall attributed the need to actualize psychic-conflict transformation and the overriding secularization of the West. He urged the "destructionization of destructive enactment in order to move beyond the death instinct replayed in a technological society which insures apocalyptic destruction and the overwhelming secularization of the West. He urged the "deliteralization" of destructive enactment in order to move beyond the death instinct replayed in a technological society which insures apocalyptic destruction and the overwhelming secularization of the West...

As violence is part of human communication, so is it also an easy and magical way to achieve power and prestige. Violence and its threat are the primary tools of state power and all hegemonic structures operating on macro- and macroscopic levels of communication. After 1970, Ortiz abandoned his use of destruction in the literal sense. He was exhausted from the concentration, dedication, and care demanded to remain "authentic" and he acknowledged the contradiction of some of his actions (especially the Chicken Destruction Ritual) with his theory of a healing art. He also realized that by using chickens and mice his ritual crossed into life and he could no longer sanction his own actual killing of life. Furthermore, he no longer wanted to spend his energy as the shaman of a cult of sacrifice which so easily was dismissed as an abuse of power rather than the healing ritual Ortiz hoped it might be.

Like many individuals of his generation, during the 1970s, he became interested in the human potential movement. He began to concentrate on finishing his doctorate, and entered a period of intense study (similar to the period which preceded the Archaeological Finds) in which he explored Tantric studies, Bio-Energics, and Macro Bionics. In 1978, he traveled to Arizona to study psychic healing and then to the top of a mountain in California to study Sufi. His pilgrimage continued to Colorado where he studied rebirthing, graduating from the Rocky Mountain Healing Arts Institute. By 1979 he was fully engaged in developing a process for "inner visioning" that led to his Physio-Psycho-Alchemy and a doctorate in 1982.

The inner visioning work drew upon his early interest in the dream. As the dream translates imagery into ideas, it reveals not conceals, clarifies not obscures, and in its task as confessor, the dream divines and breathes aura-the "unconscious mind insights. Dreamers (conscious or unconscious) symbolically dramatize their emotionally charged symptoms and reconcile the relativity of the physical universe to the observer. As the source for the discovery of residues of conflict" such as childhood experiences, socially compromised individuality, and the lack of cultural outlets for repressed experience, the dream, especially as it is enacted by the conscious mind, might work through impulses of the auxiliary ego in psychodramas which manifest the latent content of the unconscious dreamer, the associative elements, representations, and the instrumentalism which translates drives and conflicts into neurotic symptoms. As early as about 1963 in a theoretical paper, "A New Philosophy of Art," Ortiz wrote:

The artist... who struggles to resolve this dilemma, is always in search of a means to give play to his uncon-
scious. The artist is an artist because he is aware that our everyday activities cannot in any sense allow for the necessary symbolic resolutions of our unconscious. The dream is the finest example of man's ability to achieve essential symbolic resolutions. The dream is a transformative process during which distortions, displacement and condensations occur. Its most essential aspect is its sense of reality. ... If art is to be as essential an experience as the dream, if it is to be more than a superficial activity, it must utilize processes comparable to the dream.19 In Physio-Psycho-Alchemy, the initiate lies down, quietly holding a plastic beach ball between his/her knees. The initiate is instructed by Ortiz (still in the shamanic role) to breathe deeply and quietly but to maintain a steady pressure between the knees on the ball. As the initiate continues to breathe and squeeze, the body begins to warm up to the breathing exercise. A tension of the muscles throughout the body causes the initiate to glow and begin to flex, a flexing motion that, if the initiate is able to sustain the squeezing, breathing action, sets the body in an arching, flexing motion not unlike the physical responses experienced during sexual intercourse and orgasm.

During this ritual, Ortiz quietly instructs the person to begin the inner visioning process. The resulting conscious dream state is augmented by the breathing, squeezing, warming of tension and release of the action. In the conscious dreaming state, the images created are understood by Ortiz as states of creative Being. These may be understood metaphorically as lives in which the initiate, turned artist, recalls experiences, visions, emotions once possessed, now regained, or these visions may be the reenactments of conflicts or joys that animate the present condition of the person. Ortiz has written that in Physio-Psycho-Alchemy the participant becomes an artist, an artist who is him or herself the "art material, the work of art in progress, an art which is transmutative" and serves "ancient traditions of rebirth and a genuine authenticating communion of our mind, body, and spirit—of our past, present, and future."20 In this process, he cites the body as the "primal authenticating link to the magic" of mind, body, and spirit. Alchemy is considered a "special kind of symbolic formation as an extension of collective unconscious processes, the dynamics of which are also basic to folklore, fantasies, mythology, dreams, art, and the mystery religions of antiquity." He presents Physio-Psycho-Alchemy as a "process wherein one releases one's mind to one's cellular consciousness, so that the mind may know it and co-operate in its evolution."

Process Theology has situated philosophic metaphysical speculation within the discourse of modern science and mathematical practice since the 1920s when it became associated with Sir William Rowan's theory of "Action Principle," a fundamental principle of electrodynamics, relativity quantum theory, quantum mechanics, and quantum field theory. In Process and Reality (1929), the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead drew on Bergson, Bradley, and William James to shape his notion that the empirical world is framed by a cosmology. Within this rational and metaphysical condition, events and entities transmit qualities to each other through "feelings" that are genuinely reenacted from one entity to another in a sequence of mutual "becoming." Consciousness is the formation of a rare sentence arising from and within overlapping experiences. Whitehead's philosophical perspective paralleled Einstein's theory of relativity and the uniting principle of "process" is the phenomena that links Whitehead to principles of action in physics and mathematics and equally draws the philosophic speculations of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre into its frame. The interdisciplinary attention to action and process caused otherwise widely divergent investigations to cross in both the precise mathematical equations of quantum physics and in the imprecise writing on the floor of a group therapy session, as did "Danny" enacting Arthur Janos's Principal Dream. In art, Ortiz's attention to the processes of authentification draws action and event into the regions of aesthetics where individual attention to healing processes holds the key to regenerative communicative capabilities of the authenticating Self. Through the alchemy of psychological and physical action, Ortiz hoped to destroy the conscious Ego in order to return the "knowing" unconscious Id to itself. His Physio-Psycho-Alchemy, in art and aesthetics, is as contemporary, complex, and interwoven into the fabric of intellectual investigation as are advances in science, philosophy, and psychology to which Ortiz is both indebted and to which he has contributed.

III

 Destruction Art and Physio-Psycho-Alchemy represent Ortiz's contribution to the discourse of contemporary art history. Destruction Art took place during the period when formalist criticism and Minimal Art reached an apex of international influence in the arts. The values for which Ortiz stood and the art which he produced remain unacknowledged as a formidable opposition to the hegemonic aesthetic ideology which shaped that period and which, transformed as "postmodernist" criticism, remains dominant today. The significant resistance Ortiz launched against such self-absorptive, socially disen­
gaged art accounts, in no small part, for the absence of Ortiz from most art historical accounts of the period. An examination of Ortiz's omission (more a repression of Destruction Art in general) from art historical accounts of the period would collapse the linear system of art history which continues, even in the guise of partisan employment of aspects of critical theory, to reaffirm exclusionary canons of art. Trivialized as derivative and "neo-dada," his work nevertheless is pivotal in the transformation and continuation of the basic tenets of Modernism (its continuity, insufficiency, and lack of transcendences).22 De­struction Art demonstrated its contingency to social and cultural conditions of the period at the same time as it proved insufficient to transcend the destructive patterns which it sought to redress.
A critical aspect of the continuity of Ortiz's Destruction Art with Modernism resides in the persistent spiritual metaphor of the trinity of “Physio-Psychological Alchemy,” or the unity of body and mind transmuted through spirit. Such ideas stand apart from the desiccated secularism of late 1960s and 1970s formalism. Ortiz also remains removed and skeptical of the current fashionable participating in art. He explained: his work is seen as the urinal-like Beauty looking down at its mirror, the very language of Destruction Art and Physio-Psychology is so embedded in social and cultural discourse that the apparent familiarity of his visual process and theoretical position is nullified by the illusion of a facile accessibility. Repression surfaces to maintain the appearance of the status quo. On the other hand, his language appears foreign because of his recontextualization of the obvious. In this most important sense, his art escapes the idealization process of the retroactive and the summation of the text because neither forgoing nor a sufficient and impressive is able to strip his art of its mysterious component and lay it bare. Rafael Ortiz’s art is generically radical for he has consistently produced art which cannot be imitated and which defies, even as it embraces, categorization.

Footnotes

3. Among the artists and their work who should be counted are the de-collage Hoppens of Wolf Vostell in Germany, the “Auto-Destructive and Auto-Creative Art” of the standee in New York by the Time Base Event structures of John Latham in England, the “Demonstrations” of Milan Kozjak in Czechoslovakia, the Concrete Poetry of Henri Chopin (France) and Bob Cobbing (England), the destruction action-music of Juan Hidalgo and the ZAJ Group in Spain, the erotic Hoppens of Carolee Schneemann, the ontological music and video of Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, the Happenings of Al Hansen and the Guerrilla Art Action Group of John Hendricks and Jean Toche in the United States, the Art Destructive exhibition and works of Kenneth Kemble and other artists in Buenes Aires in 1961, the political agitation, Festivals of Free Expression, and Polyphonics of Jean-Jacques Lebel in France, and in Vienna the Orgies Mysteries Theatre of Hermann Nitsch, the existencial body actions of Gunter Brus, the Materialaktionen and Reality Art of Otto Müh and his commune in Friedrichshof, Austria, the psycho-sexual tableaux of the late Rudolf Schwind-Anger, and the explosive tableaux of Ivor Davies in Wales.
4. There have been a number of excellent studies published in recent years in which the authors have come to similar conclusions as those reached by Ortiz, and many years ago in his art. See particularly David Michael Levin’s The Body’s Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Rationalism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) and Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain.
5. All quotes unless otherwise noted are from conversations between Ortiz and myself since 1982.
6. Richard Haehechen’s untitled text, cited in my Rafael Montañez Ortiz Archive.
7. Ortiz has used the terms Destruction Realization, Destruction Ritual, and Destruction Theater Ritual interchangeably.
9. Ibid.
14. Ortiz could not recall the name of the woman who participated in this ritual.
17. Ibid., p. 242.
18. Ibid., pp. 242, 245.
20. See Rafael Ortiz, unpublished “A New Philosophy of Art,” c. 1963, in my Rafael Montañez Ortiz Archive.
“Destrucción: A Manifesto,” c. 1962. Unpublished, undated manifesto, KS. Ortiz’s first manifesto on Destruction Art. He described artists who work with destruction as “destroyers, materialists, and sensualists dealing with process directly” and he identified a “desperate need” for those who utilize destruction in art to “retain conscious integrity” in the symbolic, sacrificial action “which releases and raises one to the heights.”

“A New Philosophy of Art,” c. 1963. Unpublished, undated theoretical essay, KS. Art should become as fundamental as the dream in which one acts out emotional conflicts of the conscious and unconscious, thereby achieving symbolic resolutions. He continued, the artist is distinctive in his/her aim to transform and transcend physical and emotional life-energies, to decipher and evaluate experience, and to uncover and exploit “the underlying process-progressions and regressions which characterize...behavior.”

“The Science of Art Education,” c. 1964. Unpublished, undated manuscript, KS. Concerned with the relationship of transformations in dynamic systems, Ortiz compared cybernetics and mechanical communication to the symbolic, synthetic methods by which the “artist transforms and projects his inner conscious and unconscious life.” He stated that education should concern itself with self-transforming behavioral systems.

“Science and Art,” c. 1965. Unpublished, undated theoretical essay, KS. Art, like magic, has different aims than science—a rational construct which cannot produce art because of a necessity to organize the “unconscious distortions, gross ambiguities, and chaotic obscurities,” to which artists must remain sensitive, into logical systems. “A Hierarchy of Transforming Systems,” c. 1965. Unpublished, undated theory, KS. Ortiz described three interlocking and dynamic transforming systems to which the artist must resolve his/her relationship: “disordering,” which provides for the discharge of enormous energy, tension, or pain released as pleasure and satisfaction (or catharsis), “ordering,” the harmonic compromise characteristic of traditional systems; and “extremely ordering,” the “striving for perfection.” He hypothesized, “There is no reason to believe that the energy system which is the work of art, is essentially different from the energy system which is the artist.” He concluded, “The art object energy represents the continual transformation of ‘life processes’ and the quality of an artist’s art is only determined by the way the artist transforms and distributes his life energies.”

Letter to Mario Amaya, editor of Art and Artists, with statements accompanying the illustrations of Chair Destruction, 1965. Special issue on “Auto-Destructive Art,” Art and Artists 1 (August 1966). Recalling philosophical meditations by Kant and Sartre regarding the nature of appearances and things-in-themselves, Ortiz wrote: “Each swing takes me away from the chairness of the chair to the transcending complexity internal in all things. Each swing unmakes this made thing called upholstered chair; each destruction unmakes my made relationship to it.”

“Destrucción: Second Manifesto, London 1966,” excerpted in Studio International 172 (December 1966). Two-page, mimeographed tract which Ortiz handed out and read at DIAS, September 11, 1966. Ortiz enumerated biological and natural aspects of destruction that serve no apparent “survival or stabilising purpose,” i.e., cancer, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes. “Evolution is a destructive adjustment” and “survival is an abstraction made possible through psychological evolution.” Within this framework, “destructivist art gives our destructive instinct its essential expression while coming to terms with destruction’s most primitive maladaptive aspects... By bridging the gap between the good and the evil, art absorbs the evolutionary limitations of our species without threatening its biological or psychological survival.”

“To the First Fighting Pacific,” 1966. Unpublished rebuttal responding to criticism of DIAS in an article written by Roger Barnard, editor of Peace News: “DIAS: Playing with Fire,” Peace News (London) 7 (October 1966), KS. Ortiz compared Destruction Art to the dream which “cannot be censored,” whose content is “neither inherently good or bad.” Ortiz claimed, that “as Freud spoke of the sexuality of mankind,” so “the destructive artists speak of the destructiveness of man today.”

“Recollections of DIAS,” 1966. Unpublished daily chronology of DIAS events including descriptions of his own and other participating artists’ actions, KS.

“Art’s Sake Destroy,” East Village Other (New York) 2 (December 1-15, 1966). Ortiz drew upon but altered Marx’s belief that “Religion is the opiate of the people.” In a criticism of artists who failed to come to terms with destruction art and thereby get “their consciousness dirty,” he wrote: “Art is the opiate.” Art, he explained, belongs to the categories of ritual games, sports, and play where “emotional life is realized, educated and secured—where our urges, especially the maladaptive ones, get their play.”

“Destruction Theater Manifesto,” February 1967, KS. Destruction Theater, Ortiz wrote, addressed aggres-
I elaborated version of created during 12 Evenings of Manipulations, University, 1967. A pamphlet accompanying the Finds: Dricks, Lil Picard, and Jean Toche. A rhetorical manifesto to ard Huelsenbeck, and Maurice Blanc, as well as a text by reprinted in 1969-1976, states and primary mind an immediate KS.

h e utilized an ironic food metaphor (ingestion and values that integrate experience (John Dewey). remaining skeptical but more accepting of aesthetic theories that accounted for the unconscious, and id processes (James Hillman) or the representational qualities and values that integrate experience (John Dewey). Impressed with the distinction drawn by Andon Appia between presemtational art ("defining emotional meaning") and representational art ("defining intellectual meaning"), Ortiz contrasted Antonin Artaud's theatrical intent to create a "hysterical conversion" with Appia's definitions and described Artaud as a revolutionary of the "mythic," intent to subvert repressive fantasies.

"DIAS-U.S.A.-68 Preview Statement," 1968. Unpublished, handwritten single-page statement by Ortiz described Destruction Art as "the symbolic artistic realization of all the hostile destructive urges" and an art which touches obsessive secrets and "threatens to person-alize which is depersonalized: To hell with your hard edge."


Manuel Camacho and Carlos D'Andrea, Revolutionary Forces, May 20, 1970. Unpublished manifesto co-authored with Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, KS. Attacking artists for succumbing to the "Horatio-Alger Fantasy of success and power," the authors condemn "oppressive and racist institutions" and called for artists to cease making objects and become activists struggling for cultural and social liberation.

"Culture and the People," Art in America 59 (May/ June 1971). As a Puerto Rican, Ortiz explained that he had experienced cultural disenfranchisement which led him to search for a way to assert and protect his people. Ortiz was convinced he had found the answer in the "Art of El Museo del Barrio," an "alternative to the orthodox museum" which he hoped would facilitate the revival of "living values" and thereby personalize the experience of core moments in infancy and childhood such as the "rite of passage" in the individual's choice to affirm or deny life for a "higher or lower purpose." Disdaining his previous sendentiousness, he explained his intent to move art from "that Kierkegaard called sickness unto death, to wellness unto life."


"Art and the Invisible-Reality: A Manifesto," written in collaboration with Ortiz in 1967, in preparation for "PSI-ART: An International Symposium on Art and PST" organized by Ortiz and Strauss to take place in Munich, June 1988. KS. The authors describe the "invisible-reality" as a "realm of consciousness... the complex web of resonating energy of matter and its objects." They call upon artists to "attune themselves to and make visible as the content of their art that spiritual, atomic, and subconscious resonance reality... by extra-sensory perception, by such spiritual technologies as the divining rod, numenology, artography, resonating shapes, the crystal ball, processing the voice recorder, the pendulum, the 1-Chirale, the Kirlian camera, and Cleve Backster's bio-feedback plant technologies."

Books Including the Artist


Arthur Janov, The Primal Scream: Primal Therapy, the Cure for Neurosis. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970. Psychologist and psychoanalyst. Arthur Janov credits a story told to him by a patient under his care of Ortiz's DIAS Self-Destruction action at the Mathematics Theatre, September 22, 1966, as the catalyst for his formulation of "primal scream" psychotherapy, a technique in which Janov encouraged his patients to experience a moment of release by expelling a blood-curdling scream. Janov argued that a regressive experience of core moments in infancy and childhood such as Ortiz had performed in his destruction action might lead the patient to a psychological catharsis.


Jacinto Quiroz, Mexican-American Artists. Austin
I

42


Forthcoming Books On or Including the Artist


Compilation of international theories and writings, since 1945, by artists and critics, including writings by Ortiz.


Forthcoming Writings On or Including the Artist

Richard Huelsenbeck. "Ralph Ortiz," c. 1966. Unpublished, one-page typed essay by the psychiatrist and former Berlin Dadaist on Kurt Ortiz. "Ortiz... is fascinated by things which are not or are not yet. Not yet to come, not yet does not mean that you stop halfway... To destroy means to destroy oneself in the sense of space... a new concept of time and space... Ralph Ortiz is an existential sculptor and I think one of the most important ones because he is committed to some truth about ourselves in our time.


Kristine Stiles, "The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS): The Radical Cultural Project of Post-Structured Art," University of California, Berkeley, May 1987. An historical reconstruction and analysis of the art historical and social significance of DIAS and its influence on the work of the principle participating artists, among them Rafael Ortiz, Jean-Jacques Lebbel, Hermann Nitsch, Gunter Brus, Otto Mihl, Peter Weibel, Kurt Kren, John Taylor, and others. (Note: Ortiz is not mentioned in this text.)

Forthcoming Writings On or Including the Artist


Arte Sella, Sella di Borgo Valsugana, Trento, Italy. 1986. Includes quotes from Ortiz’s theory of “Physio-Psycho-Alchemy.”


Periodicals including the Artist


Donald Judd, "Review," Art Magazine 37 (September 1963). Review of exhibition at the Riverside Museum including a description of Ortiz’s Archaeological Fields as a "visual, spiritual, and powerful" work. Arthur Mosey, "Manifesto of the Dead," Freedom (London), September 17, 1966. A highly critical review of DIAS including Ortiz’s "piano-smashing" act by the editor of Freedom who explained that those who are allowed to advance their political, social, or aesthetic theories do so "only to the limitations that the tolerance of their particular society will allow them." "Museums," Time, 1965. Citation of Ortiz’s Archaeological Field no. 9 in the collection of the Whitney.

"DIAS," Art and Artists 1 (October 1966). Includes photographs with captions taken during DIAS of Ortiz and others.


Lil Picard’s "No Hood to the Fish in the Museum," New York, May 6, 1968. Essay by one of the principle artists and critics of Destruction Art in New York, on various Destruction Art exhibitions including the Finch College Destruction Art Symposium at the Judson Memorial Church, and Henriette Nitsch’s Orgies Mysteries Theatre first performed in the United States (with the help of Ortiz, Al Hansen, Jon Hendricks, and others) at the New York Film Festival "cinema "transcendental." The article includes substantial quotes from Ortiz and Picard cited Bruno Bettelheim, C. G. Jung, Sigmund Freud, and 1. Charles Frey, the critic. John Hall, "Critique: Memo for an Audience Up...", special issue on "America: War and Sex Etc.," Arts Magazine 41 (Summer 1967). The article features an illustration of Ortiz’s Life and Death of White Henry,
a chicken destruction realization performed at Eere Homol Gallery, Lube called for a new theater audience able to respond, criticize, and take responsibility for rejecting and confronting artistic assaults, by such artists as Ortiz, rather than an audience which passively accepted events with awe and appreciation.

Lil Picard, “Kill For Peace,” Arts Magazine 41 (March 1967). A review of Ortiz’s The Life and Death of White Henney, which Picard called a “Happening of Cruelty,” at the Eere Homol Gallery. Picard quoted Ortiz: “The artist must give warning, his struggle must make noise, it must be a signal... When I destroy art, I release myself and mankind from the guilt and dilemmas that comes from the destruction in everyday life, whether it be a war or an ulcer.”

John Nathan, “Notes from the Underground,” Evergreen 11 (April 1967). Nathan described Ortiz’s DIAS Self-Destruction (September 22, 1966) and quoted Ortiz extensively on the nature, social purpose, and import of destruction utilized in and confined to art.

Kurt von Meier, “Violence, Art & The American Way!” Artscanada 117/118 (April 1968). Von Meier described several rituals by Ortiz and situated them within the context of American cultural violence, citing television as the source for conveying violence in everyday things from football (“the national folk religion”) to demolition derbies and mass murderers.

John Gruen, “Vogue’s Spotlight: The Underground,” Vogue, April 15, 1968. Review of Ortiz’s “Destruction Room” during 12 Evenings of Manipulations, Judson Church, October 1967, in which the author described Ortiz as the leader of The Destructionists and quotes him: “Destruction theater is the symbolic realization of those subtle and extreme destructions which play such a dominant role in our everyday lives, from our headaches and ulcers to our murder and suicides...”


Charlotte Willard, “Violence and Art,” Art in America 57 (January/February 1969). Willard noted that violence in culture (movies, comics, television, and theater), society (pollution, racial strife, suicide, assassination, and war), and nature (storms, floods, volcanoes) are some of the events leading to a pervasive social impotence, dehumanization, and repression. Citing Kierkegaard, Freud, Robert Ardrey (The Territorial Imperatives), Konrad Lorenz (On Aggression), Desmond Morris (The Naked Ape), among others, and naming many artists who included violent and destructive aspects in their work, she described Ortiz as a “leading figure” in the destruction movement and noted that his The Life and Death of Henney Penny (1967) aesthetically described and addressed psychological conflicts.

... “Explode this Bug,” Bijutsu Techo (Tokyo) 21 (December 1969). An important issue of the monthly Japanese art periodical devoted to Destruction Art including photographs of Ortiz’s The Life and Death of White Henney, 1967, and his Ace Gallery Destruction Ritual, 1969. One of the white bugs which Ortiz printed for DIAS with images from the media was bound into every issue of the magazine for the reader to pull out and explode. The issue included illustrations of other important action artists such as Hermann Nitsch. Otto Muhl. Jean-Jacques Lebel, Wolf Vostell, Lil Picard, Milan Knizak, and artists such as Andy Warhol, Stor Brakhage, and others.

Janet I. Harris, “Letters,” Psychology Today 5 (May 1972). Letter written by the assistant director of the New York State Commission on Cultural Resources describing Ortiz as one “among a unique class of fine artists” exploring theater ritual and an artist who had developed “destruction-regression art actions... to afford the individual an opportunity to act out...”


Kristine Stiles, “Synopsis of The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and Its Theoretical Significance,” The Act 1 (Spring 1987). Historical overview of DIAS including an account of several Destruction Rituals Ortiz realized at DIAS.


Newspaper Articles Including the Artist


“‘Art in Candy,’” Provincetown (Provincetown, Rhode Island), August 19, 1965. Review of Ortiz’s candy assemblages contrasting their benign qualities with his destructive works.

“Title of Place;” Provincetown (Provincetown, Rhode Island), August 26, 1965. Illustration of Ortiz’s Barrett’s Candy Store assemblages using candy as an organic, self-destroying object.


Edward Lucie-Smith, “Things Seem: Perplexities of an Art Critic,” The Times (London), September 13, 1966. Reviewing DIAS, Lucie-Smith explored the problematic task of criticizing new and difficult art. He concluded that the art critic must remain “sympathetic, tentative, and very reluctant” to arrive at negative conclusions about unfamiliar art.

Peter Schjeldahl, “Another Season,” Village Voice, September 15, 1966. Review of DIAS citing various participants, among them Ortiz, and criticizing artists practicing Destruction Art for being “naive moralists who value good intentions.”


Jaya Landesman, “Creating Destruction as an Art Form,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 6, 1966. Review of DIAS describing Ortiz’s Chair Destruction and other actions at DIAS.


“‘Twenty-Pie Award,’ Week End Telegram (London), December 16, 1966. Notice announcing that Ralph Ortiz had received the “Twenty-Pie Award” from the magazine for causing the best “esthetic conflicts of 1966.”


Jud Yalkut, “Conversations with Ralph Ortiz,” Westside News, September 28, 1967. Essay on Ortiz with long quotes by the artist in which Ortiz cited Silvano Arieti, director of the William Allesio White Institute of Psychotherapy and researcher in concepts of schizophrenia, as a primary source for his exploration into the visceral, primitive, pathological systems associated with “early brain” development and their relationship to “late brain” development in logical, Aristotelian systems as a means to address the complex phenomena of individual destructive and creative impulses.


Maurice Blane, “Local Art... Amazements,” The Villager (New York), October 12, 1967. Review of 12 Evenings of Manipulations in which the author described Ortiz’s Destruction Room as “a landscape beyond Artaud’s theories into the crazed channels of Artaud’s, Sade’s, Nero’s Mind.” The author concluded that “Destruction Room is one step away from a return to human sacrifice. That [Ortiz’s] piece made vivid to me the agony of what napping death is like does not mean that I condone permissive art.”


Lil Picard, “Art,” East Village Other 3 (January 5, 1968). Review of Ortiz’s exhibition of several Archaeological Finds and his Destruction Realization Concert at Fordham University. Picard described Ortiz as the most “attacked, hated, and discussed Avant-gardist in New York,” who is an “educator and teacher” and an “extremely aware, daring, and powerful” artist provoking thinking and inquiry into the use of art as a field to transform aggression.

Joseph Feuer and Jay Levin, "Hippies Put on a Museum Show," *New York Post*, March 26, 1968. A review of a protest by Ortiz and Jon Hendricks against the Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition on Marcel Duchamp which they felt sani-
tized Duchamp's work.

Jill Johnson, "Dance Journal: Over His Dead Body," *Village Voice*, March 28, 1968. A considered reflection on events at the Judson Church during the DIAS Preview when Charlotte Moorman smashed Saul Gottlieb over the head with her violin after he interfered with her and "right" to smash her violin during a destruction action. The incident had extensive ramifications, Johnson wrote, and Destruction Art provided a forum for examining broad political and interpersonal questions.

Jean-Jacques Lebel, "An Artist with Balls is Worth Two in the Gallery," *East Village Other* 3 (March 22-28, 1968). Lebel, an early French Happening artist, poet, painter, and political activist who participated in DIAS, wrote an "open letter" to the organizers of the Destruction in Art Symposium in New York (Ortiz and Jon Hen-
dricks) and the participants in the then forthcoming Finch College Museum exhibition on Destructive Art. Lebel criticized the artists for allowing their authentic anti-
energy to be absorbed by what he described as the "cultural decorum and entertainment industry" which was none other than the same power structure "making napalms" and other "cultural products." Lebel advocated "going under-
ground," cutting all ties with official representatives of "culture" (galleries, alternative and traditional museums), and setting off "5 pounds of TNT" in the Finch College Museum. His letter closed with "warm love" to Jud Yalkut, Ralph Ortiz, Charlotte Moorman, Al Hansen, and the other DIAS participants, and explained: ART IS SHIT.

Lil Picard, "An Artist With Balls is Worth Two in the Gallery/Round Two," *East Village Other* 3 (March 29- April 4, 1968). Writing in defense of Destruction Art, Picard rebutted Jean-Jacques Lebel’s letter (see above) and included statements written by Charlotte Moorman, Jon Hendricks, and Ortiz. In response to Lebel’s sugges-
tion to blow up the Finch College Museum, Ortiz urged the critical importance for artists to distinguish between and separate violent actions undertaken symbolically within the strict confines of aesthetic boundaries and violent actions undertaken in life, which he anhorrated.

Gregory Battcock, "Art: Charlotte Moorman Does Not Advocate Destroying All Violins," *New York Free Press*, April 4, 1968. Invoking Ad Reinhardt’s dictum that "Art is Art," Battcock argued that although Destruction Art was grounded in Dada and Surrealism, art is not destruc-
tion but a confusion of art with therapy and finally that: "Destruction is Destruction."

Saul Gottlieb, "Yesterday Whitehall Tomorrow the Finch Museum," *East Village Other*, April 5-11, 1968. A passionate defense of Jean-Jacques Lebel by Gottlieb who authenticated Lebel’s position as a socially radical artist against Lil Picard’s insinuations that Lebel was a revolutionary dilettante. Gottlieb criticized Ortiz for sawing off branches of a tree in the Judson Church courtyard and challenged those involved in Destruction Art to a debate on the issues raised by their work. He also threatened violence against anyone who attempted to blow up Lebel’s letter to the *East Village Other* (March 22-28, 1968).

Lil Picard, "From Lil with Love," *East Village Other*, April 12-18, 1968. The second in a theoretical debate between Picard, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Saul Gottlieb, Char-
lotte Moorman, Jon Hendricks, and Ortiz on the nature and purpose of Destruction Art. Picard situated her per-
sonal experience of destruction in the context of both World War I and II and defended Ortiz as an artist of the caliber of Wolf Vostell, creator of dé-colage Happenings in Germany, and Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, and Otto Müh, founders of Wiener Aktionsmus in Vienna.

Lil Picard, "Schreckenskabinett der Kurse," *Die Welt* 91 (April 1968). Situating Destruction Art in the tradition of Dada and Surrealism, Picard reviewed exhibitions on Destruction Art at the Judson Memorial Church and the New York Filmmakers Cinematheque including a cita-
tion of Ortiz’s Destruction Realizations.

Lil Picard, "Cutting at Finch College Museums," *East Village Other* 3 (May 17, 1968). Reviewing *Destruction Art at Finch College Museum*; Picard described the exhi-
bition as an educational and important experience for those "who still exist at the end of this Century of terror and destruction."

Hilton Kramer, "Sculpture: Talent Above the Fashions," *New York Times*, May 18, 1968. In reviewing *Destruction Art at Finch College Museum*, Kramer found the exhibition "ineffably ponder" (pretentious) and "a group show of mixed talents."

Charlotte Willard, "The Destructive Impulse," *New York Post*, May 18, 1968. A review of *Destruction Art at Finch College Museum* in which the author described Ortiz as the "chief guru of the destructive art movement" and referred to Konrad Lorens’s book On Aggression as a primary source for art which seems to allay aggression with cathartic means.


John Perreault, "Gutsy," *Village Voice*, May 23, 1968: 15. A review of *Destruction Art at Finch College Museum* and destruction events at the Judson Memorial Church Gallery. Perreault argued that while these exhibitions were "worth seeing" and "destruction in art is to be preferred to destruction in real life," events like those of Ortiz and Hermann Nitsche "border on calumny and pseudo-religion and pseudo-psychiatry" and raise further questions related to brutality, insensitivity, and the nature
and value of purgative events.

Candace Burke Block, "Deconstructionist Art: sometimes gentle," Christian Science Monitor, June 1, 1968. Review of Deconstruction Art at Finch College Museum citing Ortiz's theory that the use of destruction in art is an intent to redirect audience instincts.

"I should be using an..." Vancouver Destruction Ritual and labeled Ortiz a "socially concerned artist."

"We stern Destruction..." Ortiz: "I wanted to point out the agony we are going through in New York."

..."Puerto Rican Exhibit..." New York Times, March 3, 1971. Review of Ortiz’s "Destruction Ritual as..." and others launched during the American Association of Museums meeting when they criticized such institutions for attending to private rather than public interests and called for museums to become more responsive to the public.


..."arte natura..." Arte natura, Milano Terza, September 17, 1986. Review of Arte Sella, including mention of Ortiz’s work.

..."Il rapporto tra arte e natura..." Cronache della Provincia (Merano, Italy), September 30, 1986. Review of exhibition and actions at Arte Sella, including mention of Ortiz.
There are today throughout the world a handful of artists working in a way which is truly unique in art history. Theirs is an art which separates the makers from the unmakers, the assemblers from the disassemblers, the constructors from the destructors. These artists are destroyers, materialists, and sensualists dealing with process directly. These artists are destructivists and do not pretend to play at God's happy game of creation; on the contrary, theirs is a response to the pervading will to kill. It is not the trauma of birth which concerns the destructivists. He understands that there is no need for magic in living. It is one's sense of death which needs the life-giving nourishment of transcendent ritual.

We who use the process of destruction understand above all the desperate need to retain unconscious integrity. We point to ourselves and confess, shouting the revelation, that anger and anguish which hide behind the quiet face is in service of death, a death which is more than spiritual. The artist must give warning, his struggle must make a noise, it must be a signal. Our screams of anguish and anger will contort our faces and bodies, our shouts will be "to hell with death," our actions will make a noise that will shake the heavens and hell. Of this stuff our art will be, that which is made will be unmade, that which is assembled will be disassembled, that which is constructed will be destructed. The artist will cease to be the lackey, his process will cease to be burdened by a morality which only has meaning in reality. The artist's sense of destruction will no longer be turned inward in fear. The art that utilizes the destructive processes will purge, for as it gives death, so it will give to life.

Transcendence is for the living, not for the dead. It is the symbolic sacrifice that releases one from the weight of guilt, fear, and anguish. It is the sacrificial action which releases and raises one to the heights. The sacrificial process in art is one in which a symbolic act is performed with symbolic objects for symbolic purposes, initiated by the need to maintain unconscious integrity.

The dynamics of our unconscious integrity is fantastic. It arranges content in terms of a thousand eyes for an eye, boils death and destruction for the trespasser, maybe not now, maybe not today, but some day, by God, we'll get even, even if it means headaches, allergies, ulcers, heart attacks, or a jump off a roof. Just you wait and see. Someday we'll all get even. "Every dog has his day," and when the real dog has his real day, what will he really do? Will he push a button and annihilate 200 million people, push an old lady down the stairs, join the Ku Klux Klan, expose his privates in public, or simply walk the dog to defeat on the neighbor's lawn? When the need for unconscious integrity is actually worked out in the actual world with actual people, actual things occur. There is actual conflict and actual destruction. The real moving car driven by the real driver who does not really see the real child who in turn does not really see the real car while crossing the real street, is really killed, really dead. The police cover him with a real white sheet and draw a white chalk line around him. I didn't do anything. I just watched. I didn't even get sick. I didn't even throw up. I just got really afraid. The car was big and made of steel, but I'll get even some day. There are other real possibilities, less drastic ones, possibilities which have a more essential displacement, a greater distance. The real car might have run over a real puppy or with still greater symbolic distance, a real cardboard box. The real child might have simply bumped into a parked car, bruising himself slightly, or crashed his toy car into one of his toy dolls.

Just as displacement and distance are an essential and necessary artistic means which enable the artist to submerge himself in the chaos of his destructive internal life and achieve an artistic experience, so too it is essential that the encounter between the artist and his material be close and direct. The artist must utilize processes which are inherent in the deep unconscious life, processes which will necessarily produce a regression into chaos and destruction.

A displacement and parallel process exists between man and the objects he makes. Man, like the objects he makes, is himself a result of transforming processes. It is therefore not difficult to comprehend how as a mattress or other man-made object is released from and transcends its logically determined form through destruction, an artist, led by associations and experiences resulting from his destruction of the man-made objects, is also released from and transcends his logical self.
Rafael Montañez Ortiz
Born: January 30, 1934
Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A

Academic Degrees
1975 Ed.M. Master’s—Columbia University Teachers College, New York
1964 M.F.A.—Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y.
1964 B.S. Art Education—Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Museum Collections
1978 Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Computer-Laser-Video Dance Works
1987 Museum d’Art Moderne, Brussels, Computer-Laser-Video Dance Works 1-6
1986 Friedrichshof Museum, Zurndorf, Austria, Computer-Laser-Video
1985 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N.Y., Computer-Laser-Video
El Museo del Barrio, New York, Computer-Laser-Video
1982 El Museo del Barrio, New York, Sculpture
1972 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N.Y., Sculpture
1968 Finch College Museum of Art, New York, Sculptures
1965 Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Va., Sculpture
Memel Collection, Houston, Tex., Sculpture and Film
1964 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Sculpture
1963 Museum of Modern Art, New York, Sculpture

Computer-Laser-Video Exhibitions
1987 Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne
Montevideo, Holland Distribution contract for computer-laser-video, Amsterdam
VideoFestival Geneva
Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münsterturk
“Monitor ’87” Festival, Frönländ/S, Sweden
Offensive Video, Dortmund, West Germany
Kossuth Klub, Budapest
Filmfest, Hong Kong
Video-Biennale, Barcelona
Experimental Workshop, Osnabrück, West Germany
Volkshochschule, Wuppertal, West Germany
Saw Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Filmfest, Moscow
Tamara Marzuki, Djakarta
Filmwerkstädt, Aarhus, Denmark
Finnish Filminstituut, Helsinki-Turku
Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
Westwerk, Hamburg
P.R.I.M., Montreal
Video Pool, Winnipeg
Monitor North, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
EM media, Calgary
Bonner Kunsthinweise, Bonn
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C.
LACE, Los Angeles
Obscure, Quebec
Galerie d’art de Matare, Matare, Quebec, Canada
911, Seattle, Wash.
Open Space, Victoria, B.C.
Walter Phillips Gallery, Bantiff, Alberta, Canada

Performances
1987 Physio-Psyche-Archemy, Volkerkunde Museum, Gallery of the Artists, Munich
1986 Physio-Psyche-Archemy, Pisto di Casa Stroebel, Borgo Valbajana, Italy
Duck for Roast, Francesco Conz, Verona, Italy
Wine Cabinet, Francesco Conz, Merano-Vela, Italy
Piano Concert, Francesco Conz, Merano-Vela, Italy
“Oto Weininger,” Friedrichshof Museum, Zurndorf, Austria
1985 Physio-Psyche-Archemy, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
Physio-Psyche-Archemy, Twin Palms Gallery, San Francisco
1982 Physio-Psyche-Archemy, San Francisco Art Institute
1980 Rebirth I and II, 15th Annual New York Avant Garde Festival
1976 Minx Theater, New York
1975 Theater Ritual, Judson Church, New York
1974 Video Impravisation, Space for Creative Innovation, New York
1973 Paper Bag Concert, Fine Arts Center at Russell Sage College, Troy, N.Y.
1972 Annual New York Avant Garde Film Festival
1971 Annual New York Avant Garde Film Festival
War and Peace I, Street Theater, New York
Civil Rights and Lefts, Street Theater, New York
War and Peace II, Street Theater, New York
Rev Up Ritual Marathon Game, Studio, New York
Museum Group Exhibitions: Performance

1980
“Reliquaries and Icons,” Fondo del Sol Visual Arts and Media Center, Washington, D.C.

1978
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, Colo.
Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colo.

1977
Fondo del Sol Visual Arts and Media Center, Washington, D.C.

1976
Collection of Gallery, Fondo del Sol Visual Arts and Media Center, Washington, D.C.

1975
Drawings, Columbia University, New York

1972
“Three Photographers,” Fine Arts Center, Castleton, Vt.

9 Hispanic Artists,” Association of the Arts Council, New York

1971
“Different Traffic,” Long Island University, New York

1967
Sculpture, Fordham University, New York

1966
CORA Invitationnal, Grippe & Waddell, New York
DIAS, Art Symposium Exhibition, Africa Center and Better Books, London

1965
Penny Candy and Fudge Assemblage, Barrett’s Candy Store, Provincetown, Mass.

Park Palace Gallery, New York
Contemporary Sculpture Show, Welfare Island, N.Y.
San Francisco State College

Detroit Institute of Arts
University of South Florida, Tampa

Hacket Art Gallery, Muskogee, Mich.

Tucson Art Center, Tucson, Ariz.
Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

Indiana University, Bloomington

1962
“Five from New York,” Boston Museum of Fine Art School
East and West Coast Landscape Shows, Bolles Gallery, New York

New York Sculpture and Painting, Bolles Gallery, New York

1961
Artist Gallery, New York

Museum Group Exhibitions: Performance

1987
Physio-Psych-Alchemy, Völkerkunde Museum, Gallery of the Artists, Munich

Group Exhibitions

1987
Documentation of “Arte Sella 86,” Munich

1986
Francesco Conti Archival Gallery
1. Wine Cabinet, Verona, Italy
2. Piano, Merano-Valas, Italy
3. Piano Stool and Sheet Music, Merano, Italy

56
Works in the Exhibition

Sculpture

Sunburst, 1960
Construction destruction, paper towel, staples, oil paint on cardboard
60" x 40"
Collection of the artist

Archaeological Find #3, 1961
Buried Mattress Destruction on wooden backing
6'2-7/8" x 4'1-1/4" x 9-3/4"
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art

Gift of Constance Kane, 1963
Monument to Buchenwald, 1961
Paper, earth, shoes, mixed media on wood destruction
29-7/8" x 28" x 6-7/8"
Collection of M. Collection of Rita

Archaeological Find #21, 1961
Destroyed sofa, wood, cotton, wire, vegetable fiber, and glue on wooden backing
84" x 54" x 24"
Collection of the artist

Archaeological Find #22, 1961
Destroyed upholstered sofa, synthetic fiber, cotton, wire, glue on wooden backing
108" x 54" x 20"
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art

Water Lilies I, 1961
Hammered and burnt toilet paper, oil paint, wire on wooden backing
24" x 33" x 6"
Collection of George and Lillian Schwartz

Cloud Burst, 1961
Construction destruction, staples, paper towel, lacquer paint on cardboard
43" x 64" x 6"
Collection of George and Lillian Schwartz

Water Lilies II, 1961
Construction destruction, staples, paper towel, lacquer paint on cardboard
43" x 33"
Collection of George and Lillian Schwartz

Cups, 1961
Construction destruction, paper cups, cardboard, oil paint on wooden frame
48" x 30" x 6"
Collection of George and Lillian Schwartz

Nailed Marshmallows, 1962
Marshmallows, nails on 1/2" cardboard backing
16" x 14" x 5"
Collection of R. Sue Siegel

Petrified Forest, 1962
Steel nails, dried prunes on 1/2" cardboard backing
13" x 14-1/2" x 5"
Collection of Ms. Simon Swan

Children of Treblinka, 1962
Paper, earth, burnt shoes, black paint on wooden backing
17" x 13" x 6"

Collection of Dr. Robert Schwartz

Moctezuma (Exploding Chair), 1963
Destroyed upholstered sofa on wooden backing
60" x 63" x 24"
Collection of the Everson Museum

Syracuse, New York

Archaeological Find #9, 1964
Destroyed upholstered sofa, cotton, wire, horsehair, resin, glue
77" x 64" x 23"
New Line Collection

Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Gift of George and Lillian Schwartz

Sacrifice to Truro, 1965
Destroyed upholstered chair, resin on wooden backing
68" x 30" x 20"
Collection of the Chrysler Museum

Norfolk, Virginia

Maya Zemi I, 1975
Colored feathers, fur and glue on 1/2" cardboard
38-1/2" x 31" x 30" x 17"
Collection of El Museo del Barrio

Gift of the artist

Maya Zemi II, 1975
Colored feathers, fur and glue on 1/2" cardboard
33" x 30" x 10" x 10"
Collection of El Museo del Barrio

Gift of the artist

Maya Zemi III, 1976
Colored feathers, fur, wool, beads, bird heads and claws, synthetic snakeskin and bells on 1/2" cardboard
39" x 32-7/8" x 16-1/2"
Collection of Fundo del Sol Visual Arts and Media Center,
Washington, D.C.

Video Works

Music Restruction, 1988
Installation

Computer-Laser-Video, 3 monitors, 30 min. Recycle continuous play
Collection of the artist

Early works transferred to video, 1961-79
1 monitor, 50 min, 5 sec.
Collection of the artist

Computer generated graphics and sound transferred to video, 1982-84
1 monitor, 45 min.
Collection of the artist

Computer-Laser-Video, 1985-86
1 monitor, 40 min, 40 sec.
Collection of the artist

Documentation of Performances, 1965-87

Black-and-White Color Photographs
Sacrifice to Truro Beach, Long Island, N.Y., 1965
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles
(Refer to Work No. 15, Sacrifice to Truro, on exhibit in the West Gallery)

Photographer: John Prosser
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

Photographer: John Prosser
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

Chicken Destruction (with Julie Abeles), New York City, 1966
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles

Destruction Room, "12 Evenings of Manipulations," Judson Memorial Church, New York City, 1967
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles

Piano Destruction, Fordham University, New York City, 1967
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles

(Refer to Installation No. 19, Homage to Huesenbeck, on exhibit in the West Gallery)

The Birth and Death of White Henny and Black Penny Destruction in Art Symposium—U.S.A., 1968, Judson Memorial Church, New York City
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles

Piano Concert Destruction Ritual, 1987
Merano-Velau, Italy
Photographs from the Archive of Kristine Stiles
(Refer to Installation No. 19, Homage to Huesenbeck, on exhibit in the West Gallery)
**Photo Captions**

**Front cover**
Chair Destruction, 1965 Truro Beach, Cape Cod, MA
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Inside front cover**
Destruction Theater, 1969
Hollywood, CA. at Ace Gallery
Photo: Irwin Glaser
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Title page**
Duncan Terrace Mattress Destruction for DIAS, 1966 London, England
Collection of Jay Landesman
Photo: John Proser

**Page 5**
Archaeological Find #33, 1965
Mommy Mattress on wooden backing Collection of the Artist

**Page 6**
Moctezuma (Exploding Chair), 1963
Destroyed upholstered sofa on wooden backing Collection of the Everson Museum, Syracuse, NY

**Page 7**
Archaeological Find #9, 1964
Destroyed upholstered furniture, plastic, glass, glue, steel
77" x 64" x 23"
New Line Collection, Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art
Gift of George and Lilian Schwartz

**Page 9**
Henny Penny Piano Destruction, 1967
Studio Invitational, New York City

**Page 11**
Monument to Buchenwald, 1961
Burned shoes and mixed media on wood 29 7/8" x 28" x 6 7/8"

**Page 13**
Archaeological Find #3, 1961
Burnt Mattress Destruction on wooden backing 6 5/8" x 41 1/4" x 9 3/4"
Collection, Museum of Modern Art
Gift of Constance Kane, 1983

**Pages 16-17**
Henny Penny Piano Destruction, 1967

**Page 19**
Photo: John Proser
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Pages 20-21**
The Birth and Death of White Henny, 1967, Eco Homo Gallery
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 23**
The Birth and Death of White Henny, 1967, Eco Homo Gallery
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Pages 26-27**
Artist Worker’s Coalition Demonstration, 1970-71
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Photo: Jan Van Raay

**Page 29**
Physico-Psycho-Alchemy Arte Sella, 1987 Borja Valsugana, Italy

**Page 31**
Chicken Destruction (with Julie Ahees), New York, 1966
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 34**
Chair Destruction, 1965 Truro Beach, Cape Cod, MA
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 35**
Archaeological Find, 1964
Chrysler Museum
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 37**
Destruction Theater, 1969
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles
Photo: Irwin Glaser
Courtesy of Ace Gallery

**Pages 40-41**
Archaeological Find #21, 1964
Destruction. Spring sofa, wood, cotton, wire, vegetable fiber and glue on wooden backing.
84" x 54" x 24" Collection of the artists

**Page 45**
Destruction Theater, 1969
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles
Photo: Irwin Glaser
Courtesy of Ace Gallery

**Page 46**
Computer-Laser-Video, 1984
Photo: Leah Lauffer

**Page 47**
Computer-Laser-Video Bridge Game, 11 mins. 45 sec., 1985

**Page 49**
Computer-Laser-Video
Pusmann Pusmann, 1984
Photo: Leah Lauffer

**Page 51**
The Death of White Henny and Black Penny, 1968 DIAS
Judson Memorial Church, New York

**Page 53**
Computer-Laser-Video What is This? (opera), 10 min., 1985
Photo: Leah Lauffer

**Page 57**
Chair Destruction, 1965 Truro Beach, Cape Cod, MA
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 61**
Archaeological Find, 1962
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles

**Page 62**
Artist Worker’s Coalition Demonstration, 1970-71
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Photo: Jan Van Raay

**Inside back cover**
Participants in the Destruction in Art Symposium, London, 1966
Top row, left to right: Susan Cahn, John Sexton, Rafael M. Ortiz, Kurt Kren, Ener Donagh, Peter Weibel, Bryant Patterson.
Front row left to right: Henri Chopin, John Toche, Gustav Metzger, Herman Nitsch (holding poster), Julian Hidalgo (kneeling).
Photo: John Proser
From the Archive of Kristine Stiles
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