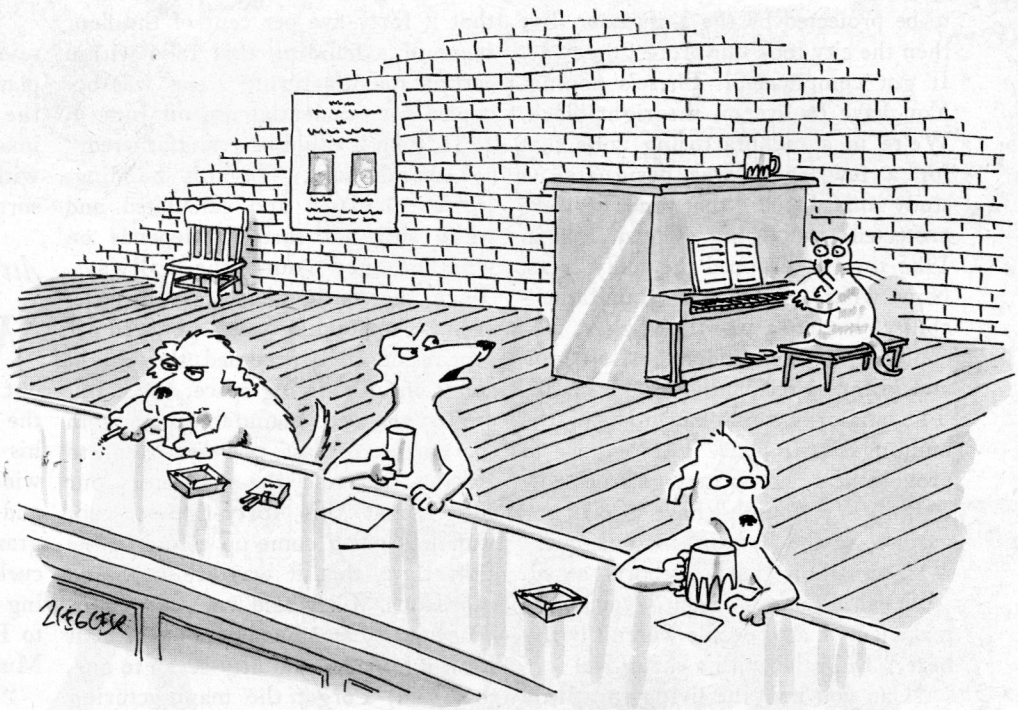
experience for them, and they would love it!"

Loft Tenants

ONE of the more banal things you can do to an artist is to ask him for a description of his work. We slipped and did just that the other Saturday as we stood in front of Deborah Masters' sculpture-in-progress "Circle," a group of several bulky, earth-colored plaster female figures, which has since become part of a group show at the Whitney Museum's outpost at Philip Morris, on Forty-second Street.

Deborah had called us the night before. "I'll be getting ready for my show—they're coming to pick up my work on Monday—so I might be a little distracted, but why don't you stop by? Bill will be here, and we'll bring you up to date on the Loft Tenants." She meant Bill Nogosek, an artist who works with paper, paint, and Rhoplex, and who has been keeping us abreast of what's happening with the Brooklyn Loft Tenants, an association of about five hundred loft-dwelling artists.



"Hey, pal, let's hear 'Doggie in the Window' again, and this time play it like you mean it!"

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Deborah—a petite woman with large green eyes—has a huge loft, with the usual chairs, tables, stove, and coats-on-pegs, and also with some oversized plastic garbage pails full of soft red clay, a skylight fifteen feet overhead, and a complicated rig of chain falls suspended from the ceiling. At the moment we arrived, she was flipping over a cassette tape (Jessye Norman singing Richard Strauss), Bill was carrying in a six-pack of Brooklyn Lager, and Ellen Druart, a small, spry woman, who is Deborah's assistant, was painting some thick clear liquid on the inside of a seven-foot plaster mold of a female figure's back. "She's using tincture of green soap—it's been around for centuries," Deborah told us. "Michelangelo probably used it. It acts as a separating agent, putting a coat of oil between the plaster mold and the hydrocal—that's a harder kind of plaster. Next, we'll mix a bowl of hydrocal up and paint it in. After that, we dip strips of burlap into hydrocal and stick them onto the mold. Then the hydrocal will harden, and we'll break the mold off. All that can take hours. At some point tomorrow afternoon, Ellen will be lowering the front of the legs onto the sculpture and I'll be pressing burlap into the seams and putting in tie rods to hold the halves together. To do that, I'll have to crawl up inside the torso."

After watching the process get under way, we wandered into an adjoining room. There four completed female figures towered over us, and that's when we asked Deborah, who had followed us in, "So how would you describe your work?"

She thought for a minute. "Well, I can't describe it, but I'll tell you why I did it," she said. "We had a child who lived next door—Adrian, who was seven. He was the first child born to any of the artists in this neighborhood. I don't know if my life will ever be organized enough for me to have children, so I was very close to Adrian. And a year and a half ago he died in an accident. His father is from Sweden, and his mother is from Texas, and relatives came from all over. All of us women began working together really intensely, while the men sat around like vegetables. It wasn't something I would have expected. We were just as upset as the men, but we were reacting in a different way. This sculpture is about the women who came together. It's first a piece about grief, but ultimately it's about hope—about people continuing. The women are supposed to be close to the wall, so that when you enter you feel as if you were intruding a bit."

As Deborah walked back into her workroom, she said, "When we all arrived here, ten and fifteen years ago, these huge places were advertised in the newspaper, and we got residential leases. Most of us were from out of town, and it seemed legitimate. Then the city started evicting people from commercial buildings."

Bill—a methodical young man with spiked dark hair and round wire-rimmed glasses—picked up the story. "In 1982, Article 7C of the State Multiple Dwelling Law, or the Loft Law, was passed, to legalize living in buildings previously used for manufacturing, commercial, or warehouse purposes—places where it used to be illegal to live, in other words," he said. "If there were three or more residential units in the building during what they called the 'window period'—between April 1, 1980, and December 1, 1981—you're supposed

to be protected by the Loft Law. But then the city took our protection away. It got complicated. There's zoning. You have to live on the right block. We're in a manufacturing zone that for a few years was designated a study zone. During that time, we were protected from being evicted. But in 1985 the city dropped the study areas. Now what we have is grandfather-ability. Is that a word? Anyway, that could get us back under the Loft Law and grant us residential-tenant status. The landlords would have to bring the buildings up to code. They'd have to provide heat, hot water, garbage collection. We wouldn't have to take our garbage to the F train, for example."

"You still do that?" Deborah asked.

"Yeah, I guess it's habit—you know, make it look as if people weren't living here," Bill said, with a shrug.

"Can you imagine living in a little apartment in the East Village and doing this work?" Deborah asked us, twirling around and swinging her paintbrush in a hundred-and-eighty-degree arc.

"You have to be a zoning expert to live in a loft," Bill went on. "I haven't told you how we'd be eligible for grandfathering. That's a good story. At a 1985 Board of Estimate meeting, the city decided at three in the morning that if forty-five per cent of the floor space of a building that falls within certain manufacturing zones was occupied for residential use on June 4, 1981, then it could be grandfathered."

Deborah said, "In this building, we've calculated and calculated and we're still not sure. It depends on whether they count the hallways. Then, there's the worst-case scenario: even if the building was a hundred per cent residentially occupied, they might count only the living space, and count our art spaces as manufacturing. So in the spring of last year we went to Albany and told the legislators our story—that this forty-five-per-cent stuff had never come up before in the Loft Law, that it was arbitrary and capricious. They said we were right. They passed an amendment to the Loft Law, a hundred and fifty-seven to one, that said, Forget the manufacturing zone, it doesn't matter where you live. The legislators were all really friendly; they asked us to send them photographs of our work." She laughed, and bent down and started to apply dipped burlap to the mold.

"So we thought we were O.K.," Bill said. "But now the city is suing the state to prevent the amendment from being enforced. And nothing is happening."

"It's starting to harden," Deborah said, looking up and pushing a lock of plaster-speckled hair off her face with the inside of her arm. "Can you imagine the anxiety of living in a place with tons of sculpture and not being sure how long you can stay?"

Attitude

Willie Leake used to have his own house (the House of Ninja), but it has closed; now he's with the House of Field. He's a lank man in his twenties, as lithe as a yogi, with wide doe eyes, a sliver of a mustache, and a wavy mane of black hair that grazes his shoulders in intricate shiny curls. Recently, he directed the Voguing segment of "An Evening Devoted to House Music and Voguing" at El Museo del Barrio, uptown.

"Voguing," the program notes explained, "is an underground club form of entertainment which appropriates and subverts the images, fashion and music prevalent in mainstream culture. Voguing, which is manifested in competition between alternative social clubs who take their names from Paris fashion design houses, is an imitation of fashion shows, performed by men who strive for best form, movement, and appearance. The standards for these competitions come from the fashion dictates and models' poses featured in *Vogue* magazine." And, just to make the picture a little clearer, the evening started off with an explanatory video, "Voguing: The Message." Next came some female fashion models, to demonstrate the vocabulary of the mannequin: poise, insouciance, charm, disdain, humor, hauteur—in a word, attitude. (Willie had trained them.) And, finally, the Voguers themselves: Willie, Sean, Lamar, Lance, D'Juan, David, Jose, Cesar, Fidel. Singly or in pairs, and to the insistent Latin and African rhythms of d.j.-mixed music, they slithered, skittered, or lunged across the small space left

"And would the gentlemen like a table with a fax or without?"