

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

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PRESS RELEASE

May 1, 1985

HELEN MAYER & NEWTON HARRISON

MAY 18 – JUNE 15
GALLERY HOURS: TUES-SAT 10-6

A TALE OF THREE CITIES

HOPE IN PASADENA A FORTRESS IN ATLANTA SECOND CHANCE
FAILURE IN SAN JOSE

A TALE OF THREE CITIES presents the collaborative responses of the Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison to three distinct urban environments. The works were initiated by an invitation to “come and think” about the environment by a university art gallery, a museum and a civic organization. Emerging from discourse and shaped by the metaphors that surfaced, the work of Mayer and Harrison argues for a change of consciousness about the environment in which they find themselves.

HOPE IN PASADENA

The Arroyo Seco Release – Flood Control and the Destruction of Rivers

The Arroyo Seco Release was exhibited and performed initially at the Baxter Art Gallery of the California Institute of Technology and a shorter version was displayed in the Council Chambers of the Pasadena City Hall. The ideas developed during a visit by the Harrisons to Pasadena to address the Western Regional meeting of the Garden Clubs of America. The work was supported by funding from the Pasadena Art Alliance.

The narrative, a short series of poems, presents a “wound in the land”, a concrete flood control channel surrounded by ten foot fences topped with barbed wire in which the small local river, the Arroyo Seco, is contained. A proposal is made to heal this “wound” by stitching it together with concrete. To stitch the wound necessitates covering the existing concrete channel with a concrete cap which would itself be covered by earth and planted with such native grasses and shrubs as could survive the altered conditions. A low flow stream would be bedded down one side of the Arroyo. The flood control channel, acting now as an underground conduit, would continue to convey the periodic floodwaters on their journey to the sea. Pasadena would gain an 84-acre park in a densely packed urban-suburban environment with a continuous ground plain and several acre pond. One time the Arroyo Seco Release could be used as a model for the reclamation of all the rivers in the Los Angeles Basin.

A FORTRESS IN ATLANTA

The Rights (Rites) of Assembly and Passage on the Streets

The second work, Fortress Atlanta, developed from an invitation to do an exhibition that related to human rights sponsored by the Human Rights Conference at Emory University. Initially the Harrisons were interested in discovering the ways in which architecture and urban planning interfaced with human rights in the city of Atlanta. Arriving in Atlanta, they experienced the fortress-like character of the city's downtown. This work, through images and text, presents the ways in which architects and planners interfered with the rights (and rites) of assembly and passage on the streets.

SECOND CHANCE

FAILURE IN SAN JOSE

Forgotten River

The third work, Second Chance in San Jose: The Guadalupe Meander, A Refugia for San Jose, was supported by the Art Gallery of San Jose State University and later funded by the Arts Council of the City of San Jose Museum of Art. In it, the Harrison's explore a small river running parallel to San Jose's newly redeveloped downtown. The artists note that the early plans for redevelopment did not mention the river. Later, through their efforts, a task force was formed to deal with the river.

The Guadalupe Meander opens up the idea of the river as a refugia/park that would counterpoint urban development. The work chronicles the story of the Harrison's experiences with numerous city officials and the Army Corps of Engineers. The initial battle to preserve the river from being encased in 900-running feet of concrete was lost. Fortunately, as of this week, due to community support, the issues will be re-opened in the city.

Over the past 10 years, the Harrison's work has been concerned with social and political issues. In addition to the works represented in this exhibition, they have proposed the idea of a lake for the excavation at Les Halles (1974); the reclamation of a spoils pile at Art Park (1977-78); and the reconstruction of a disrupted walking system, a project for the Baltimore Promenade (1981).

Presently the Harrisons are directing their attention to the next phase for the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena and a number of other projects in California. They are also beginning work on a project concerning the New Jersey Wetlands.

The public is invited to the opening Saturday, May 18th. A reception for the artists will be held from 5 to 7 PM that evening. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 AM to 6 PM. (Monday by appointment only.) For further information concerning the exhibition contact Lynn Cassaniti; for publicity photographs contact Barbara Goldner at 212-226-3232.