BREAD & PUPPET

WHAT IS CHEAP ART?
CHEAP ART COMPREHENSIVE VISION SHOPS
AND EXHIBITS

During the last six years (starting about 1980)
Bread and Puppet has produced several hundred pounds
of art-work on cardboard, masonite, wood, newspaper,
newsprint, and fabric that has been offered to the
general public for popular prices, ranging from 10¢
to $20.

The Cheap Art exhibits and sales are not considered
a sideline secondary to theater work, but originate in
the same conviction which started Bread and Puppet in
the early '60s in New York City: art is bread, art
must be accessible like bread, and—just as the
degenerate tastebuds of the fluffy white-bread-eaters (who inherited that dessert-like stuff which fattened Louis XVI from the French Revolution) must be challenged with rough old sourdough rye, crusted with the smell of pine and cedar coals which bake it--so the elitist art consumer must be provoked and the educated misconception of art as a privilege of the overfed, emotionally disturbed, a-political members of interior-decorators' clubs must be challenged--not in order to persuade them to a new cause but in order to start off new art-eaters with the right ingredients.

On behalf of these truths and in the spirit of Kurt Schwitters's Merz-manifesto (...wir fordern die sofortige Beseitigung aller Uebelstaende...), Bread and Puppet has organized numerous exhibits and shops to provide practical cures for the ills of the deceived art-consumer as well as the no-art consumer and as an answer to the unabashedly money-obsessed Zeitgeist.

In 1980 we loaded our bus with a hundred or so cookie-size mass-produced pictures of household objects, clouds, hills, and fiddling and raking washerwomen and drove it into neighboring Vermont villages, collected a summons for unauthorized salesmanship in Montpelier, and distributed original paintbrush products to uninhibited grown-ups and kids. Since then we've rented storefronts and tables in country fairs, or had them loaned to us in New York City.

The latest occasion for fresh and cheap art mass-production was a five-day workshop at Johnson State College, Vermont, in February, 1986, where for the first time a catalogue of major categories of possible purposes which art might serve was created, providing our clientele with the opportunity to purchase original anonymous paintings, not simply by following the unreliable preferences of individual taste, but by choosing a type of life-assistance which art dares to offer and which the catalogue suggests as a guideline.
The following categories were listed and stamped on each painting:

1) cure for heartaches  
2) escape from reality  
3) courage for going to the dentist  
4) spring-weather protection  
5) soothing for stomach-ache  
6) protection from evil landlord  
7) talisman for airplane-travel  
8) charm for exams  
9) amulet against blues  
10) help getting up on Monday mornings  
11) consolation for pet-death in the family  
12) hunger-thirst-appetite-distractor  
13) nightmare reduction  
14) salvation from Reagan  
15) salvation from other political disasters  
16) flat-tire and engine-failure comfort  
17) ex voto