

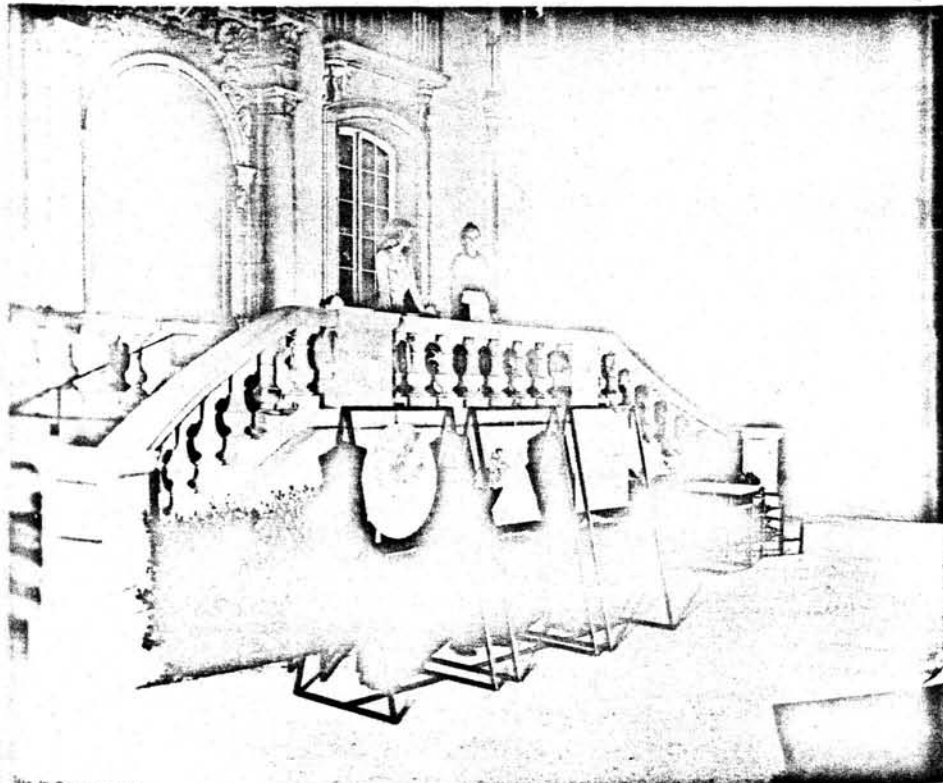
Each portrait is completed in a single sitting of about two hours, which gives it a freshness and spontaneity that several sittings would probably kill.

The principal pleasure derived from the 15 portraits in pencil, pen, and ink wash is that of seeing great drawing. Bachardy's drawing is detailed and precise at the face and hands but almost spare at the other parts of the body

where the lines largely suggest contour rather than create mass. Bachardy refers to these works as "drawings of people under stress," the stress being that of sitting two hours for one's portrait. Aspects of character become manifest under this stress. Gore Vidal appears cold and suspicious. Evely Hooker looks bored but patient. The young Mark Valen is puzzled and ques



Don Bachardy, *Gore Vidal*, 1977, pencil and ink wash, 24 x 19".



Connet and Bob Wilhite, *Ramona*, 1977, performance at the California Institute of Technology (Pasadena).

tioning. A wonderful drawing of Renate Druks shows a woman sitting with head held erect and hands clasped across her breast, looking at the artist like an imperious but wise queen granting an audience. In acknowledgment of the sitter's contribution, each drawing is signed and dated by the sitter rather than by the artist.

Bachardy's work shows a considerable sensitivity to the natures of his media. In contrast to the pencil drawings, which are fine and precise, the 17 watercolors are loose and free. Great pools of color slide off the sides of faces. A few broad strokes suggest the shape of a chest. The runniness and transparency of the medium are exaggerated, and this makes these works not just paintings about people but paintings about painting.

I found many of these watercolors disturbing. Faces are painted with the colors of a bruise. Paint on a nose or cheek slides across the face in the manner of Francis Bacon, suggesting that the face is dissolving before one's eyes. In the painting of Rick Sandord, white eyes staring out of a purple face appear to be those of a demon.

Bachardy began watercolors 12 years ago to loosen up from the restrictiveness of his drawing. Though these works are more generalized than the drawings—more paintings than portraits—and tend toward abstraction, one has the certainty after seeing them that one could pick out the subjects in a crowd since each has a strong *feel* of the person. He's permissive with the medium, allowing it to express its elusive nature as fully as possible without going out of his control. Bachardy is dancing at the edge of a cliff, but so far he hasn't lost his balance.

GUY DE COINTET's and BOB WILHITE's third performance, *Ramona*, was about overlapping sensory perceptions. The eight actors "see" sounds, "hear" sights, and "taste" noises. De Cointet's script attempts to create a world of carefree unreality and illogic somewhere between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Although both de Cointet and Wilhite are essentially visual artists whose individual works have included performances where the conception was more important than the execution, in *Ramona* the reverse seems true. Here the play's the thing. And a very conventional thing it is. The action takes place on an October evening in the pre-

sent time. Ramona, a painter, has just moved into a California farmhouse overlooking the Pacific. Several friends visit her. Suzanne arrives crying because her lover, John Bentley, disappeared five months ago. John Bentley appears, is reunited with Suzanne, and says he has just escaped from a ship where he was held prisoner. A batty, unnamed woman delivers a hilarious monologue about how helpful her dog Alice was in administering her an adrenalin shot to stop an asthma attack in Lima, Peru.

*Ramona* was performed outdoors in front of a floodlit 18th-century Spanish facade in Pasadena and had the look of a *son et lumière* production. The night was balmy; the facade was handsome; the production was professional; and the actresses, to a woman, were stunningly beautiful. But beyond these very pleasant aspects, there seemed to be little of substance here. De Cointet's ideas about perceptions through unconventional senses seem potentially provocative, but in *Ramona* they are explored neither deeply nor especially clearly. The *non sequiturs* in many of the lines seem to serve no purpose: instead of suggesting a topsy-turvy or looking-glass world where conventional logic is reversed or altered to create a system of illogic, they are merely banal. The actors' characterizations are flat—intentionally, Wilhite says—but it is hard to see what purpose this serves: there are no pronouncements or theories voiced that might be better understood for being thrown into relief against the play's flatness.

Bob Wilhite's music throughout the play came from three rather unresonant gongs—a stainless steel circle, a brass triangle, and a copper square—he made for the performance. Wilhite has constructed several musical instruments before, including a silent harp and a good-looking wood-and-glass one-stringed instrument which, he admits, doesn't sound like much (although it *does* sound like more than his silent harp). Wilhite says he is more concerned with how his musical instruments look than how they sound, and this curious concern seems akin to de Cointet's interest in the sound of sights and the taste of noises.

One had the feeling that there were potentially interesting ideas about sensory perceptions lurking below the surface of *Ramona*. If there were, de Cointet did not articulate them, and below the surface is where they unfortunately remained.

—JEFFREY KEEFFE