

THE Urge TO Merge

Art Attack

A year ago, curious passers-by wondered whether the antebellum wood-frame house at 427 Massachusetts Ave. NW was being turned into a disco. A huge diamond-shaped piece, reaching from doorstep to cornice, had been cut from its facade. Reassembled and suspended from the roof through a circle cut in the second-story floor, the diamond turned and twisted like a pendulum.

Dedicated to the late New York artist Gordon Matta-Clark, the house/sculpture was the work of Art Attack, which has the esprit de corps of a revolutionary cadre. The goal of its four members—Lynn McCary, Alberto Gaitan, Evan Hughes, and Jared Hendrickson—is to ambush the public with art where it's least expected. Their operating method is to work so closely together that "an individual's contribution is virtually indiscernible."

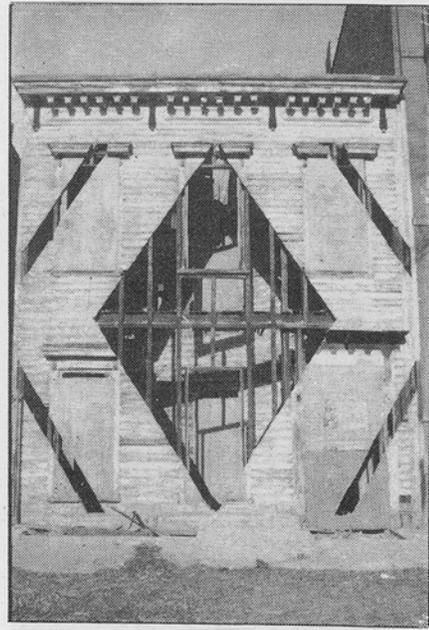
Each brings different skills to the group. McCary is the administrator and public relations expert. Hendrickson works as a manager at the 9:30 Club during the time he can spare from writing poetry, performing, and making art. Gaitan, currently curator of new music at the WPA, is a musician, composer, photographer, and computer specialist. "He's Mr. Science, our walking encyclopedia," says McCary. Hughes is a sculptor and designer whose one-of-a-kind furniture works were shown at Bader Gallery in January.

With such different characters, unanimity is not always so easy to achieve. While they were preparing their 1987 installation in Germany—a televangelists' chapel complete with videotapes from PTL and Oral Roberts—all four lived together for over a month in a single, concrete-floored room.

"You see the very good and the foul about each person's personality under these circumstances," says McCary. "Unanimity's a lot to ask. But I like the challenge. Collaboration is a form of personal questing....It requires you to defend your own point of view."

In 1984, an Art Attack installation in the Olshoynsky gallery offered to bite the hand that feeds the art community by including a "critics' corner" with a leather chair, a smoking stand, and a library. "[A]ll it seems to lack is a brandy snifter and a golden Labrador," wrote *Post* writer Joe Brown.

The group is also well-known for its assault on the the facade of the deteriorating



Art Attack's attack on 427 Massachusetts Ave. NW

Lansburgh Building at 9th and F Streets NW. A dozen "ascending" cardboard figures, dressed in thrift-shop hand-me-downs, were affixed to the building's facade. For weeks, the sight of the urban climbers drew second takes from the block's nightclubbers and shoppers.

Art Attack's favorite project is the one it completed last summer in Marseilles, France. "Recombinant Phoenix," a series of seven identical 1-ton sculptures, was made from materials the members of Art Attack found on the Marseilles site—an abandoned slaughterhouse.

The group's populist sensibility—to liberate art from the museums and galleries—is not without repercussions. In 1986, when the group commandeered a half-mile stretch of MacArthur Boulevard's median strip from V Street to Dana Place NW, the neighborhood roasted the artists in a *Post* news story. The fencing, antenna, and bright-blue disc sculptures of "Five Continents/Divide" were derided by locals as junk. "Some of us call it Heart Attack," resident Christine Saunderson told the *Post*. (The exhibit's creators stated that "Five Continents/Divide" was about development and commuters' need for visual stimulation.)

Although they remain committed to Art Attack (now incorporated as a non-profit group), McCary and Hughes moved to New York in January. "After spending a month working in Europe, it was terribly frustrating to move back here," says McCary. Pending projects for the group include an outdoor sculpture for Snug Harbor Cultural Center in New York and another abandoned-house project in D.C. for fall 1990.

"Collaborative work pushes your limits," says Jared Hendrickson.