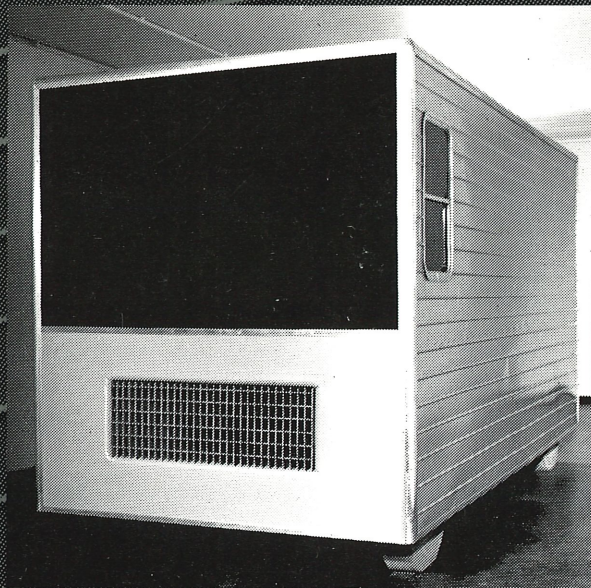


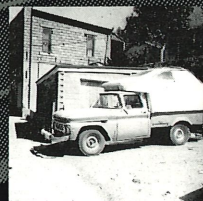
THE ZULU

(EUROPEAN VERSION)



CANADA
HOUSE
CULTURAL
CENTRE

A N D O T H E R W O R K S B Y
ROBIN COLLIER
17 MAY - 30 JUNE MON - FRI 11 - 5



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LONDON
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TELEPHONE
01-629 9492

F O R E W O R D

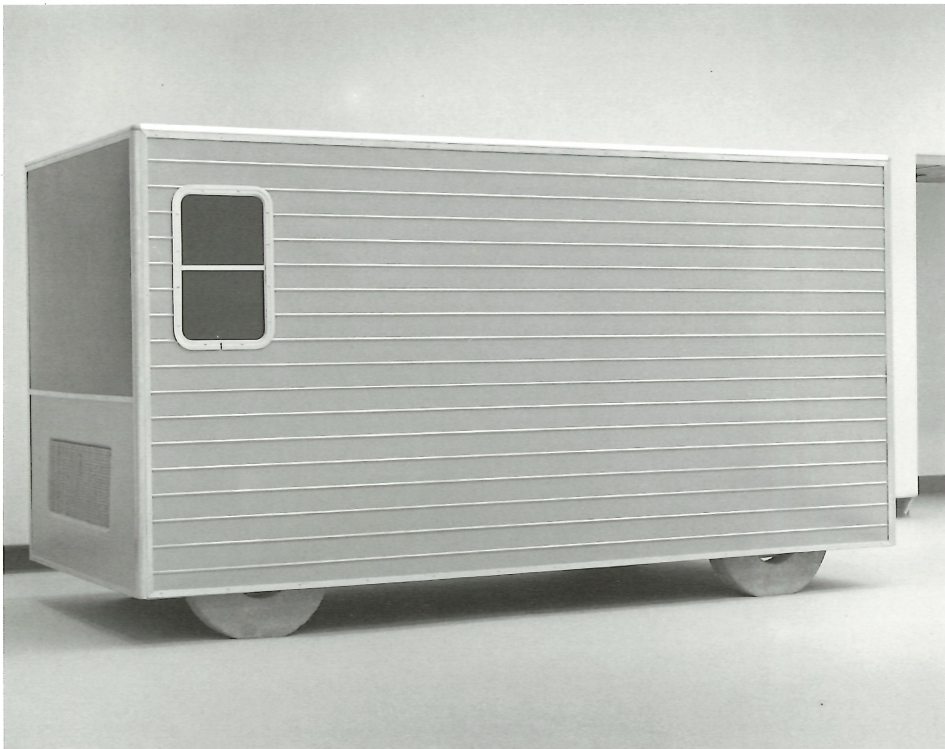
The work of Robin Collyer was first noticed in Canada at the beginning of the 1970's. Since then his reputation has steadily grown and he is now at the forefront of that generation of Canadian sculptors whose work is known and admired internationally.

The present exhibition concentrates on two works, both produced within the last five years and related to the industrial and urban landscape. In the case of *The Zulu (European Version)*, 1985 a strange duplicity takes place as the work's explicit physical presence denies its implied functionality. Familiar components induce the spectator to a false sense of recognition of the sculpture as a 'real' object (a trailer), but the reality is somewhat different. A similar paradox exists in *What Affects*, 1987. The sculpture is reminiscent of a desk but again our perceptions are challenged. The materials used for its construction negate any usage.

The exhibition also includes a number of the artist's graphic works which provide a source of visual references, some of these references can be identified in the three-dimensional pieces.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the support and the significant loan of works from the Art Gallery of Ontario. We are grateful to them and, in particular, to the Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art, Philip Monk who has assisted in the organisation of the exhibition and provided an introductory text for this publication. We are also grateful for the interest shown by the artist and his dealer, Carmen Lamanna; the latter has also most generously lent to the exhibition.

Michael Regan
Visual Arts Officer



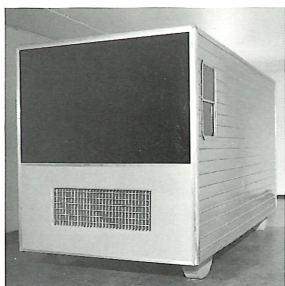
ROBIN COLLYER INTEGRATION & DIFFERENCE

Since the early 1970's Robin Collyer's sculpture has maintained a certain form of construction and juxtaposition of materials while adapting itself in a critical manner to a changing cultural logic. The latter has articulated the relation between object and system; and Collyer has pursued the logic of this interaction through works where objects, images and language intersect in different combinations.

Whereas, in the early 1970's, his first works showed an evident concern for differentiating formal and material qualities in sculpture: contrasts of material, placement and support; a decade later, the sculptures established distinctions of look and function between different systems of representation. Reference played a role even in those first, formal works; but its employment was all the more apparent from the mid 1970's on when the elements of those ensembles were objects made by the artist to resemble other things, or that were in fact models made by him. Concurrent to his sculptural practice, Robin Collyer produced photo-textual works. The strategies involved here inflected the sculpture of the 1980's which incorporated photographic image and text - or their techniques of display - into their construction.

The investigation and presentation of systems or typologies have

also been achieved through certain constructions of reference. More recent works - such as *The Zulu (European Version)*, 1985 - could be said to play on typologies of forms found in the industrial and urban landscape. But they are not a simple record or simulation. These sculptures are configurations of unaltered industrial materials, existing standards that are combined and constructed to make certain referential associations. They may encompass ensembles of materials or single, fabricated objects of monumental scale. The large-scale



sculptures were preceded in 1983-84 by a group of works of similar manufacture that assumed architectural configurations, but they were of a scale that situated the sculpture in the space of the gallery as if in a landscape. The relation of these configurations, which

were constructions from common industrial or commercial forms rather than exact models, to buildings in an industrialized or commercialized landscape seemed automatic.

The works of 1985 are either eccentrically modified vehicles that go nowhere (*The Zulu*) or automotive body parts that are made into containers (the truck bed of *Wonder Mini Storage*). These dysfunctional objects are closely related to certain of Collyer's photographs. The photographs also seem to compose an "inventory" of vernacular forms and structures. (1) Although elegantly constructed, *The Zulu (European Version)*, like its companion piece, *Wonder Mini Storage*, has a put-together character that reminds us,



beyond any immediate association of its appearance, of a type of handy man adaptations that we find in oddly transformed vehicles or strangely fitted storage sheds, the "subjects" of some of these

photographs. The photograph, however, is not the assurance of the mimetic correctness of the sculpture or of the aptitude of the artist, that is, of the sculpture's resemblance to its "model" in the real world. The work's similitude is constructed, and in that construction something else takes place.

Because of the articulation of their construction, the sculptures from 1981-84 can be analysed linguistically. Their structure, then, parallels the various systems - whether the information technologies of commerce, weaponry or television - their forms "mimetically" direct us to. Accordingly, each of the works unites an internal construction to an external reference. The axis of combination comprises the construction and the axis of selection encompasses both the material and the figurative references of the elements. Each piece can thus be read and read into another system of meaning. And as each makes sense within a particular system of meaning, this insinuation has the potential of a critique.

The Zulu's efficacy is of an altogether different nature. Obviously, this sculpture is still a construction, but it tends towards a seamlessness not pursued in any other works: its surface of vacu-form plastic and its black plexiglass, being a reflective surface, rebuffs penetration. We cannot piece together a meaning from its construction alone, as a part to part concatenation is lacking. *The Zulu* displays an opacity that is not of the order of language. Rather, we could say that these conditions - its opacity and its glossy seamlessness - align it to the photographic image (one of society's saturating representations). Thus, instead of taking the fragments of an industrial-commercial culture and recombining them in new meanings, *The Zulu* integrates

itself as a whole into the environment while being absolutely different from it at the same time.

As Collyer's photographs show the sometimes brutal juxtapositions brought about by cultural and technological change (the *Transformer Houses* photographs exhibited here engage another investigation), so these sculptures register a cultural transformation from the order of material production to that of sign systems, from an economy of production to one of consumption. Because the sculptures do not merely replicate man-made structures in the world, but themselves are capable of a signifying function, the reference they now make is to a landscape and environment that has been transposed into a sign system. Meaning is displaced, transported as if a vehicle in space along



different channels of communication.

The evacuation of substance is reflected partly in these non-functional, signifying objects' use of vacu-form plastic, for instance, and in the works' ability to project themselves as images, or rather signs. We should not read the devolution from object to sign as a passive consumption; it is just as much an active transformation. Collyer's constructions compose one system while dismantling another. Construction never takes the form of a simple display. While the ensembles of materials as a whole refer to objects, structures or sign systems, because the materials are both put together *and* articulated, they assert their own independent meaning. Although more intentionally critical, the operation is analogous to the "values" which are expressed in vernacular structures. The latter, however, do not affirm a parallel value, that of technology for instance. These hybrid constructions have a

tendency to undermine the original values or sources of material and to assert the individuality of the *maker* in its place. Elsewhere this procedure has been called *bricolage*.

Collyer's sculptures then are signs of an active material culture. They bring together a material culture and a sign system, each of which is a double figure: a positive construction and a critical analysis.

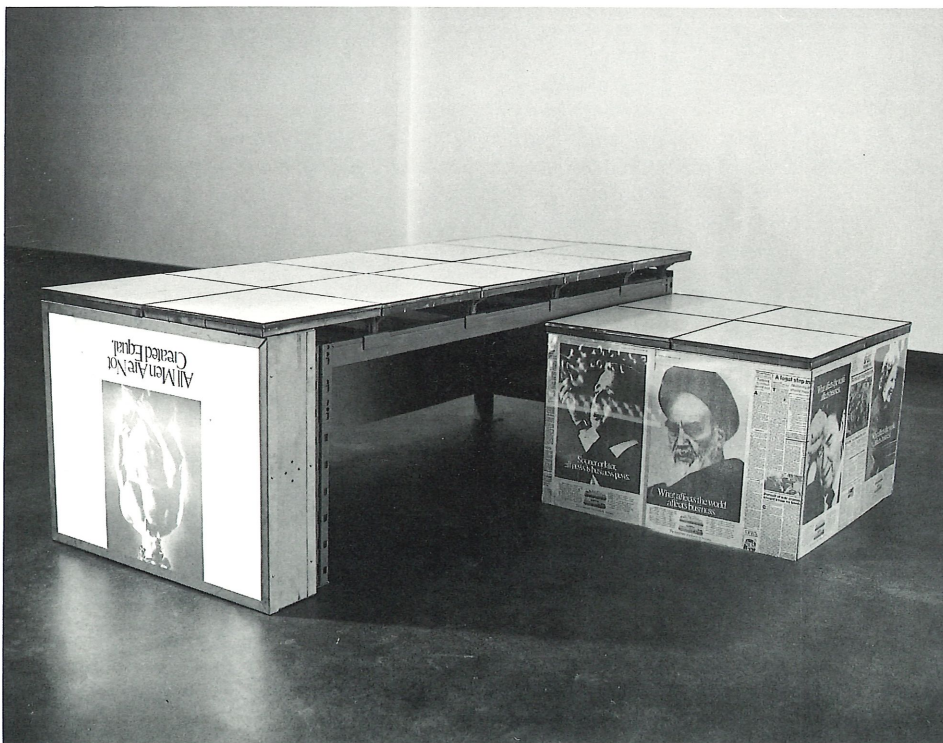
The ability of one work to contain these multilayered associations is illustrated by *What Affects*, 1987, part of a series of work from 1987-88. Here the change of scale is internal to the work, adjusting the reference of the piece from front to back, as it changes from a building, for instance, to an office desk. This change of scale and association can accommodate the implication of power relationships displayed in the various manners of the lightbox and the newspaper surround of the typing return. (A potential inversion of values perhaps is asserted in tile floor serving as the "roof" of the desk form.) Once again the meaning of

this work coheres in its construction in which both images and materials are supports, and both the support and materials are images. Images are a means of construction, "supports" of a particular, material, power relationship. As with all Robin Collyer's sculptures, this work demonstrates that a construction is also a representation and that a representation is a construction.

Philip Monk

Note:

1. These photographs, along with Collyer's *Transformer Houses* of 1987 (hydro-electric transformer stations "housed" in buildings consonant with their surroundings), are similar to the work of the Becher's; yet they are at one remove from the Becher's photographic registry of the "ruins" of industrial production. The record of ruin, brought about by changes in the commodity process, has been displaced by the construction of elements of a new fragmented reality. And what was a typology of the forms of industrial production in a landscape of ruin has been replaced by an "inventory" of the vernacular adaptation of industrial products.



E X H I B I T E D W O R K S

***The Zulu (European Version)* 1985**

vacu-form plastic, steel, aluminium, cement, tinted plexiglass, wood
205.0 × 371.8 × 170.5 cm
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario
Purchase, 1985

***What Affects* 1987**

fluorescent light box, colour transparency, poster, plastic, plexiglass,
steel frame, aluminium and linoleum table, photocopy on newsprint
77.6 × 232.2 × 18.4 cm
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario
Purchase with the assistance of The Canada Council Art Bank, 1988

***Brisbee, Aris* 1984**

silver bromide print
26.5 × 26.5 cm
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario
Gift from the Peggy Lownsbrough Fund, 1985

***Chapleau* 1985**

silver bromide print
26.5 × 26.5 cm
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario
Gift from the Peggy Lownsbrough Fund, 1985

***Britt* 1984**

silver bromide print
26.4 × 26.0 cm
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario
Gift from the Peggy Lownsbrough Fund, 1985

Camera Test

***2130 Kipling Avenue* 1987**

black and white photograph
Robin Collyer / Carmen Lamanna Gallery

Camera Test

***165 Burbank Avenue* 1987**

black and white photograph
Robin Collyer / Carmen Lamanna Gallery

Camera Test

***85 Pemberton Avenue* 1987**

black and white photograph
Robin Collyer / Carmen Lamanna Gallery

C H R O N O L O G Y

- 1949 Born in London, England
1957 Moves to Toronto
1967-68 Ontario College of Art, Toronto
1971 Begins showing regularly at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery,
 Toronto
1976 Owens Art Gallery, New Brunswick
1977 'Kanadische Kunstler', Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland (Group)

- 1982 Agnes Etherington Arts Center, Kingston, Ontario
 'Okanada', Academie de Kunst, Berlin, Germany (Group)
- 1983 Travelling exhibition organised by the Agnes Etherington
 Arts Center, venues included:
 Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; Dalhousie Art Gallery,
 Halifax; London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario;
 49th Parallel, New York.
- 1984 Musée d'art Contemporain, Montreal
- 1985 'Aurora Borealis', Centre International d'art Contemporain,
 Montreal (Group)
- 1986 'Focus: Canadian Art 1960 - 1985', Art Cologne, Germany
 (Group)
- 1987 'Documenta 8', Kassel, Germany (Group)
- 1988 'Active Surplus: The Economy of the Object' 49th Parallel,
 New York (Group)

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- Robin Collyer and Kim Adams* (Gary Michael Dault) *Vanguard*
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- Intepretation of Architecture* (catalogue to the exhibition) YYZ Gallery,
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- Trailer Art Pulls* (Lisa Balfour-Bowen) *Globe and Mail* (10 June
 1987).
- Documenta 8* (catalogue to the exhibition) Kassel, Germany 1987.
- Active Surplus: The Economy of the Object* (catalogue to the
 exhibition) PowerPlant, Toronto 1988.
- Collyer at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery Artscribe* (September/October
 1988).



Published on the occasion of the exhibition
The Zulu (European Version)
and other works by **Robin Collyer**

17 May — 30 June 1989
Canada House Cultural Centre,
Director: Curtis Barlow
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Telephone 01 - 629 9492

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