THE WAR SHOW
Nancy Buchanan, Mel Edwards, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Jerry Kearns, Ben Sakoguchi, Nancy Spero, Tim Rollins and 12 Kids from the South Bronx

MARCH 22 - APRIL 29, 1983
ART GALLERY, FINE ARTS CENTER
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK
Methods of making a choice through combat, a "decision by arms", have evolved from hand-to-hand, spear, stone, sword and arrow skirmishes to more anonymous assaults on humanity by technologically exotic weaponry. Humankind has moved from the ability to annihilate individual members of the species to the capability of rendering the planet earth null and void, a death relayed by micro chips and delivered by multiple nuclear warheads. As death-by-remote control arsenals have developed, the individual "opponent" has withdrawn from the direct view of the consequences of the blow delivered. The eye-to-eye contact of centuries past has given way to viewing potential victims as target data on a viewing screen.

Assault from the air represents one of the broadest leaps into detachment of the opponent from combatant, or opponent from civilian casualty. (The first aerial assault was made by hot air balloons over Venice in 1849 by Austrian Lieutenant Franz Uchatius2). Attack from the air did not take on its apocalyptic aspects until a more "reliable" method of flight was developed in 1903 by Orville and Wilber Wright. Warning of potential negative uses of flight appeared in the "science fiction" of Jules Verne, Clipper of the Clouds (1873), Albert Robida's War in the 20th Century (1883) and H. G. Wells' War in the Air (1908)2.

Although the first (1899) and second (1907) Hague Peace Conferences attempted to pass resolutions to stop the use of aerial attack, the requests for a permanent ban were defeated.

"Like a kind hearted executioner, the bomb permitted its perspective victims to go on living seemingly ordinary lives up to the day that the execution should suddenly and without warning be carried out."14

Artists have been on both sides of the war issue either romanticizing or idealizing military exploits for their patrons or condemning the carnage as did Francisco Goya (1746-1828) in his Disasters of War etchings (1816-1823). Italian Futurists12 extolled war and militarism whereas powerful visual statements against its horrors for both combatant and civilian were made by Otto Dix (1891-1969), Kathe Kollwitz (1861-1945) and George Grosz (1893-1959). Ironically, they were born in Germany, one of the leading countries in pursuit of increasingly more destructive armament during the 19th and 20th centuries. Although protest images were not the central core of Picasso's work, Guernica was created as a protest of the saturation bombing in 1937 of Guernica, an historic former Basque capital.
Although the 1945 atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred under American auspices, it was curiously missing at the time as subject matter in American artists' work, considering the magnitude of the destruction and loss of life. Over the past 37 years information concerning the effects of the bomb has been relayed sporadically by means of published medical documents and the recent release of films censored immediately after the war. The acknowledgement of this data has coalesced in a potent upsurge of awareness and an incorporation of "nuclear conscious" images in a broad spectrum of artists' work.6 (Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat of nuclear weapons has been used twelve times including for example: in 1948, Berlin blockade (Truman); 1953, Korea (Eisenhower); 1958, Lebanon (Eisenhower); 1962, Cuban missile crises (Kennedy); 1968, Siege of Khe San (Johnson); 1969, 1972, Vietnam (Nixon); 1980, Middle East (Carter).7

Powerful and disturbing images of the Vietnam War brought directly into home and studio by news media created a more immediate impact compounded by the reality of personal loss and bereavement. As a result of this more direct access to information, Vietnam imagery appeared more frequently in the same time frame as on going events.

The predominant theme in The War Show is the artists' attempt to deal with the concept of "radical evil."

"When crimes are of a certain magnitude and character, they nullify our power to respond to them adequately because they smash the human context in which human losses normally acquire their meaning for us. When an entire community or an entire people is destroyed, most of those who would mourn the victims, or bring the perpetrators to justice, or forgive them, or simply remember what occurred, are themselves destroyed."8

Tragic aspects of the war in Vietnam are examined by Leon Golub in "Vietnam" II and Ben Sakoguchi in his orange crate label series. Golub overwhelms us with the sheer scale of his image, a metaphor for the overpowering magnitude of the events which seemed to escalate and unravel unchecked. Using unstretched canvas, itself a coarse, taut, and rent surface, the image of targeted civilian and aggressor appear; the unarmed desperate, fragile victim confronted by the brutally indifferent uniformed infantry equipped with the latest killing apparatus. Culled from news photo sources, the images have the anonym-
Nancy Spero, whose use of the bomb theme emerged in the 1960's, addresses the ferocious sexuality of aggressive total destruction creating a malevolent archetypal A-bomb image. Monstrous forms of the bomb intertwine and spew forth his/her victims echoing Francisco Goya’s *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* (1821-1822). The bomb is depicted by Spero as the ultimate destructive force from which there is no escape once it is unleashed. She has stated that the sexuality of military aggression can be heard in the bombardiers’ use of loaded slang metaphors for dropping bombs on targets, often spoken in terms of “delivery,” or “dropping a load,” etc. Spero’s images do not absolve from responsibility one gender over another.

Mike Glier’s massive wall painting and drawing conveys dramatically that each of us is responsible for permitting the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as preventing their use. Glier’s images seem to arise from a cinematic wide-screen, larger-than-life, view of the world, creating a rapidly transmitted image with “punch” of a billboard message. While Spero’s works have a strangely contemplative, meditative quality through the urgent poetry of a savage yet measured “caligraphic” brushed line, Glier’s application of form and line gives us a sense of time speeded up. The different sensitivity to time of an artist born into a generation whose life has from birth been under the threat of extinction can be seen therefore in contrast to the past generations’ sensitivity to time having been born before the necessity to have the memory of what it was like without “the bomb.”

Nancy Spero, Mel Edwards, Jerry Kearns and school children from the South Bronx.

Nancy Buchanan, a performance artist, reveals in *Fallout from a Nuclear Family* her struggle to deal with an inner conflict of “responsibility” as the result of having a person who is part of the “military power structure” within the family. Through a series of 10 unique book works she unfolds a portrait of her father, Louis N. Ridenour, Jr., (1911-1959), a nuclear physicist who was Chief Scientist for the Air Force and head of a branch of Lockheed. Buchanan states, “...Because of the position he held (often consulting on defense matters), I (also) hoped the piece could be seen as a ‘portrait’ of social forces operating during the growth of the cold war.”9
Mel Edward's *Imagination*, a sculpture installation, gives us the "aftermath," the remnants of mankind stripped to its bare frame. Barbed wire, with its "long history in war of obstacle and enclosure," steel, and bone, form figures that stand as stark reminders of the fragility of human flesh against the unleashed power of cosmic forces.

Jerry Kearns' wall installation of graphite and conte crayon figures brings us back full circle to contemplate the cause and the effect of our actions. Shadows of children playing war games with mock guns march across the wall in the presence of the shadow of a screaming child. The image of the screaming child, which appears in Kearns', Golub's and Sakoguchi's work, seems to represent the dire warnings of the 'child from the past, [admonishing us about] the implications for our future.'

"At the epicenter of the Hiroshima explosion a man was painting a wall. Perched on a ladder with arm outstretched he disintegrated. Like a comic strip figure who has been hurled through bricks, his outline was imprinted on the wall. The silhouette remains. The man was severed from his shadow as the atom was split."

The children's work included in this exhibition, *Hypo-Center South Bronx*, was executed as a collaboration project organized by artist Tim Rollins. Each child, after reading Hiroshima survivors' accounts in *Unforgettable Fire*, was asked to create an image relating what he or she had read to the possible consequences of an atom-bomb being dropped on the South Bronx.

Utilizing varying points of view and mode of execution, representatives from several generations of artists are in his or her way contemplating the tragic consequences of our past, present and future actions as nuclear war seems an approaching possibility.

"Because the weight of extinction, like the weight of mortality, bears down on life through the mind and spirit but otherwise, until the event occurs, leaves us physically undisturbed, no one can prove that it alters the way we live... Since the future generations are specifically what is at stake, all human activities that assume the future are undermined directly."
“Indeed if we admit the reality of the basic terms of nuclear predicament — that present levels of global armament are great enough to possibly extinguish the species if a holocaust should occur; that in extinction every human purpose would be lost; that because once the species has been extinguished there will be no second chance...”

HOWARDENA PINDELL

NOTES:
6. Over the past 12 months there have been a number of exhibitions in response to artists articulating their fears about war and the potential for a nuclear annihilation: Visual Politics, Alternative Museum, New York; War Games, and The Atomic Salon (in collaboration with Village Voice), Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; Decision by Amas, Just Above Midtown/Downtown, New York; The War Room, Gallery 345, New York (travelling exhibition); and Dangerous Works, Parsons School of Design, New York.
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works are on loan from the artists unless otherwise indicated.

NANCY BUCHANAN
Born Boston, Massachusetts, 1946. Resides in Madison, Wisconsin.

_Fallout from the Nuclear Family_, 1980
10 books, 18 photographs
Books: 9 x 12 inches (variable). Photographs: 10 x 12 inches
Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

MEL EDWARDS
Born Houston, Texas, 1937. Resides in New Jersey.

_Imagination_, 1983
Installation: Steel, 12 x 18 feet

MIKE GLIER

_No One's Responsibility But My Own_, 1983
Installation: Chalk and latex paint, 23 x 47 feet

LEON GOLUB

"Vietnam" II, 1973
Acrylic, 120 x 480 inches
Courtesy Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York

JERRY KEARNS
Born Petersburg, West Virginia, 1944. Resides in New York City.

_Between Light and Shadow_, 1983
Installation: Acrylic, conte crayon, graphite, 12 x 40 feet

BEN SAKOGUCHI
Born San Bernardino, California, 1938. Resides in Pasadena, California.

The following works are acrylic on canvas, 10 x 11 inches:

_Waste-Em_, 1977
_M-16_, 1979
_Interrogation_, 1979
_Acceptable Kill Ratio_, 1979
_K.I.A._, 1979
_Napalm_, 1979
_Body Count_, 1979
_Zap_, 1979
_Self-Defense_, 1982
_Liberty_, 1982

NANCY SPERO
Born Cleveland, Ohio, 1926. Resides in New York City.

The following works are gouache and ink on paper:

_Bomb_, _Canopy Jar_, _Victims_, 1966, 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Bomb Proliferation_, 1966, 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Bomb Shitting_, 1966, 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Bomb & Victims_, 1966, 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Female Bomb_, 1966, 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Female Bomb_, 1966, 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 23\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Female Bomb_, _Victims_, 1966, 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Male Bomb_, 1966, 23\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Sperm Bomb_, 1966, 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 33\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Bomb & Victim in Individual Bomb Shalter_, 1967, 23\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Female Bomb_, 1967, 23\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Male Bomb_, 1968, 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 23\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches
_Victims and Helicopter_, 1968, 35\(\frac{1}{4}\) x 24 inches

TIM ROLLINS and 12 Kids from the South Bronx:

_Christina Marie Argula_, age 13
_Adam Alberto Badillo_, age 13
_Clayton Capo_, age 13
_Angel Gonzalez_, age 14
_Michael John Gonzalez_, age 14
_Malloy Nesmith_, age 13
_Leonard Rahming_, age 14
_Chiaki Roberts_, age 14
_Adelaida Santiago_, age 13
_Roberto Santiago_, age 12
_Juan Soto_, age 14
_Juanita Watson_, age 14

_Hypocenter: South Bronx_, 1982
Tempora and pencil on paper, 18 x 24 inches each (installed 10 x 10 feet)
Courtesy Group Material / Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Tim Rollins / Michael Gonzalez (age 14). _Hypocenter: South Bronx_, 1982
Photo Credit: Andre Serrano
PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

1975  FACULTY EXHIBITION
1976  MICHÉLLE STUART
      RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
      SALVATORE ROMANO
1977  MEL PEKARSKY
      JUDITH BERNSTEIN
      HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
1978  LEON GOLUB
      WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
      JANET FISH
      ROSEMARY MAYER
      THE SISTER CHAPEL
1979  SHIRLEY GORELICK
      ALAN SONFIST
      HOWARDENA PINDELL
      ROY LICHTENSTEIN
1980  BENNY ANDREWS
      ALEX KATZ
      EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
      ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
      OTTO PIENE
      STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
1981  ALICE NEEL
      55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
      JOHN LITTLE
      IRA JOEL HABER
      LEON POLK SMITH
1982  FOUR SCULPTORS
      CECILE ABISH
      JACK YOUNGERMAN
      ALAN SHIELDS
      THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
      ANN McCOY

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK
THE FINE ARTS CENTER