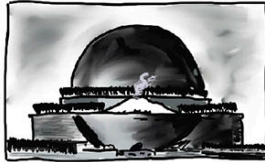


IN 1956, HE MOVED TO NEW YORK WHERE HE MADE ART WHILE WORKING AT THE LIBRARY OF THE COOPER UNION MUSEUM FOR THE ARTS OF DECORATION (UNTIL DECEMBER 1961).



IN THE LIBRARY, HE CAME INTO CONTACT WITH THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS OF ETIENNE LOUIS BOULLÉE (1728-1799), JEAN-JACQUES LEQUEU (1757-1826) AND OTHERS.



Etienne Louis Boullée
Newton's Cenotaph, 1784.

IN MAY OF THE SAME YEAR, HE HELD HIS FIRST SHOW IN NEW YORK AT THE JUDSON GALLERY. HIS FIRST PLAN WAS TO SHOW FIGURE PAINTINGS, BUT INSTEAD HE SHOWED SCULPTURAL WORKS MADE OF PAPER, WOOD, WIRE AND OTHER MATERIALS, TOGETHER WITH DRAWINGS AND POETRY.



AN ELEPHANT MASK MADE WITH WIRE AND PAPIER-MÂCHÉ.

Elephant Mask, 1959.

IT COULD BE WORN ON THE BODY.



Lady, 1959.
WOOD SCRAPS ATTACHED TO A COAT RACK WITH NAILS.



HE DISPLAYED Elephant Mask PLACED ON TOP OF Lady.

\\ PATTY WORKED AS A MODEL. \\



Pat in Black Underwear, Seated, 1959.

IN FEBRUARY 1959, HE HELD A SHOW OF DRAWINGS AT THE COOPER UNION ART SCHOOL LIBRARY. MARCS RATLIFF (1935-2022) AND TOM WESSELMAN (1931-2004), WHO WERE STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL, INVITED CLAES TO TAKE PART IN A SHOW AT THE JUDSON GALLERY WHICH THEY STARTED IN THE BASEMENT OF THE JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH.

IN 1959, HE SAW 18 HAPPENINGS IN 6 PARTS BY ALLAN KAPROW (1927-2006) AND THE BURNING BUILDING BY RED GROOMS (b.1937). HE WAS IMPRESSED WITH GROOM'S WORK AND SAW IT SEVERAL TIMES.



* CONCEIVED BY ALLAN KAPROW, "HAPPENINGS" WERE A FORM OF EXPRESSION CONSISTING OF ACTION WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SERENDIPITY.

IN 1960, HE HELD A JOINT SHOW WITH JIM DINE (b.1935) AT THE JUDSON GALLERY. USING THINGS PICKED UP FROM THE STREETS. THEY MADE THE WHOLE VENUE INTO A WORK OF "ENVIRONMENTAL ART." CLAES'S CONTRIBUTION WAS DUBBED THE STREET AND DINE'S THE HOUSE. CLAES ALSO STAGED HIS FIRST HAPPENING THERE.

BURLAP TRASH BAG FILLED WITH NEWSPAPERS. \\



Street Head III (Profile with Hat), 1960.



Snapshots from the City, 1960.
CLAES SITS ON THE FLOOR SWADDLED IN BANDAGE-LIKE MATERIAL.

IN DECEMBER 1961, IN A SHOP THAT HE RENTED IN MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE, HE EXHIBITED THE STORE AS AN OUTLET OF THE "RAY GUN MANUFACTURING COMPANY" WHERE HE SOLD HIS CREATIONS. FROM THE FOLLOWING FEBRUARY, AFTER CLOSING THE STORE, HE STAGED PERFORMANCES AT THE SAME VENUE WITH PATTY, LUCAS SAMARAS (b.1936) AND OTHERS.

EVERYDAY ITEMS FORMED WITH WIRE AND PLASTER, ETC. AND PAINTED WITH ENAMEL COLORS THAT HE USED STRAIGHT FROM THE CAN WITHOUT MIXING.



Small Yellow Pie, 1961.



Blue Shirt, Striped Tie, 1961.

BRUSH STROKES

\\ REMINISCENT OF ACTION PAINTING. \\

SPLASHING

DRIPPING -



Cash Register, 1961.



* THE "RAY GUN" IS AN IMAGINARY WEAPON THAT APPEARS IN SF MOVIES. CLAES MADE MANY RAY GUNS AND COLLECTED □ SHAPED THINGS THAT RESEMBLED A RAY GUN.

IN SEPTEMBER 1962, HE HELD A SOLO SHOW AT THE GREEN GALLERY WHERE HE SHOWED LARGE-SIZED SOFT SCULPTURE FOR THE FIRST TIME. THIS WORK CAUSED A SENSATION AND HIS USE OF EVERYDAY THINGS AND IMAGES TURNED HIM INTO A LEADING FIGURE OF THE POP ART MOVEMENT.

HIS SOFT SCULPTURES HAD THEIR START AS PROPS OR COSTUMES SEWN TOGETHER BY PATTY FOR HIS HAPPENINGS. AN EARLY EXAMPLE SAUSAGE (1957) CONSISTED OF A STOCKING STUFFED WITH NEWSPAPERS.

\\ EARLY WORK \\

ORIGINALLY A PROP FROM THE PERFORMANCE STORE DAYS (MARCH 2 AND 3, 1962).



Sausage, 1957.



Freighter and Sailboat, 1962.



Floor Burger, 1962.

UNLIKE CONVENTIONAL SCULPTING TECHNIQUES SUCH AS CARVING OR LAYERING (CLAY, FOR EXAMPLE), HE SHAPED THE WORK FROM THE INSIDE BY STUFFING MATERIAL INTO IT. HIS WORK ALSO HAS A FLUIDITY THAT COMES FROM BEING SOFT.

* "ENVIRONMENTAL ART" APPEARED FROM THE LATE 1950S INTO THE 1960S, ALONG WITH HAPPENINGS. IT ENCOMPASSES AND TREATS THE VIEWER AS PART OF THE ART ITSELF. MANY ASPECTS OF IT OVERLAP WITH INSTALLATION AND EARTHWORK ART.

* FROM NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER 1962, HE PARTICIPATED IN THE "NEW REALISTS" SHOW HELD AT THE SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY THAT IS SAID TO HAVE LAUNCHED THE POPART MOVEMENT. THE TITLE IS A TRANSLATION OF THE NAME OF THE AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENT "NOUVEAU RÉALISME" THAT WAS ACTIVE MAINLY IN FRANCE DURING THE 1960S. THE ART CRITIC PIERRE RESTANY (1930-2003), A LEADER OF THE MOVEMENT IN FRANCE, TOOK PART IN THE ORGANIZING OF THE SHOW.