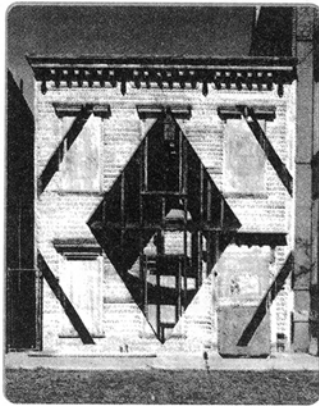


Over the next few days, the BLF sent out press releases and 35mm slides claiming hundreds of such hits up and down the state so the short-lived hack might live on, as it does here, in *media res*.



A VISIT FROM ART ATTACK,
photo by E. Owen

THE REAL DECONSTRUCTIONISTS) You're driving down a road in suburban Arlington, Virginia, late at night, just a grenade lob from the Pentagon and a shoulder rocket away from CIA headquarters. Passing the lot at 4749 Old Dominion Drive, you do a flashback double take at what used to be an old abandoned farmhouse. The structure you now see is like something out of a bizarre dream. The front yard is covered in water, with the ceiling of the front porch floating upside down in it. The facade of the building appears to have slipped, as if it had been rolled down like a car window. The revealed upper floors are cantilevered in different directions; a radiator slides across one of them. The staircase that once went from the first floor to the second now starts from the second and punches its way through the roof and towards the stars. From a room on the ground floor a low rhythmic clanging can be heard as a piece of wire cable flails the guts of a piano. Window panes, freed from their frames and suspended by monofilament, bang around as fragile chimes that shatter as the wind gusts.

Hakim Bey's instruction to create phony alien landing sites as acts of poetic terrorism is old news to the members of Art Attack, a collaborative art posse that's been mutating the commons for years with their public art hacks. Since 1979, it has altered the urban landscapes of Los Angeles;

Washington, D.C.; New York; Berlin; Linz; Austria; and elsewhere. The group started in Los Angeles as an outlet for process-oriented artists with free time and good ideas who wanted to do anonymous guerrilla art. Over the years, Art Attack has become more established and above ground, opting to trade anonymity and the thrill of clandestine art making for a bit of notoriety and the ability to create more complex work supported by donations of material and equipment (and, all too infrequently, money). The group has always worked as a team, not simply a group of artists contributing individual work. "The group as prosthesis . . . that's how I see it . . . the superorganismal artist," says Alberto Gaitán, a long-term member. "Art Attack is an experiment in human cybernetics, working with process, feedback, and the inevitable chaos to transform something that's been given to us." "We've always been committed to bringing art into everyday lives," says founder Lynn McCary. "Our work is site-specific, temporary, and not for sale." Another interesting feature of Art Attack is its multidisciplinary cast of characters. Arts administration, architecture, music, video, metal sculpture, painting, graphic arts, cabinet work, performance art, film, and pyrotechnics are just some of the disciplines that long- and short-term members have brought to the table. "Having a lot of different types of artists involved gives each of us an opportunity to share our expertise with others and to learn about theirs," offers Gaitán.

On college campuses, "building hacking" is the art of finding hidden rooms, passageways, and sealed basements of old buildings. Art Attack is a group of literal building hackers, deconstructing existing structures before they succumb to the wrecking ball. Besides *Dominion Dum* (the apparition described above), there was *Vessel*, another Arlington attack where the group filled the basement of a house with water and cleaved the garage in half. For 427 *Massachusetts Ave., N.W.* in downtown Washington, D.C., it cut a diamond shape out of the building's facade and used the removed exterior as a mobile that freely turned inside the structure.

Although building hacking is a big part of what Art Attack does, it's not the only thing. *For Demarkation*, a site work in east Berlin, it erected five mysterious-looking aluminum posts in vacant lots with no explanation of their meaning. In 1985, it created the *Used War Lot*, a meditation/provocation on war, in an abandoned used car lot. An inversion of the Vietnam Memorial was erected and covered with pages from the Washington, D.C., phone book. Then-member Jared Hendrickson (now with the band Chemlab) paraded around like a crazed car salesman with a bull horn, hawking the contents of the installation, which included dirty needles collected from the inner city war zone where the site was located. "People were outraged, especially when they found their own name, address, and phone number on 'the wall'" says McCary. "Somehow, having that information posted in this environment was unnerving to them, even though it was readily available at any corner phone booth."

With the exception of the more boisterous *Used War Lot*, Art Attack's work has a subtlety about it. There are many clever little hacks and visual jokes that exist within the larger deconstructions. The big changes draw you in, but the little things make you pay attention. There's a haunted feeling of connection with the lives of the people who once inhabited these spaces. What would they make of this? It's as if the building was experiencing one more bright burst of light and heat, one last hurrah before it implodes to dust. It's probably no accident that water (a symbol of reflection and memory) is an Art Attack leitmotif.