

Dick Schaap

## Art, But Is It Yes?

The world's first intentional exhibit of Yes Art opens tomorrow, at the Fitzgerald Gallery on Madison Avenue, and not everyone is going to like it. Some people will find the "Brillo Descending a Staircase" too shocking. Others won't appreciate the special ambiance of "Souperman," a large oil showing Superman painting a Campbell's Soup can. And even people who know what they like may object to the harsh repetitiveness of the mechanical parrot, programmed to utter, over and over, Claes Oldenburg's memorable dictum: "I am for the art of bending and kicking things and breaking them and by pulling on them making them fall down."

Robert Cenedella, the young father of Yes Art, is prepared to be scorned. "It's a breakthrough, like Van Gogh," he said the other day. "We're not understood. Many people do not give us a serious hearing."

But Cenedella, who could, understandably, be bitter, is patient. "Look how long it took Pop to be accepted," he said. "A year, I think."

What is Yes? This is the sort of question you're going to be hearing more and more of, and Cenedella tries to supply an answer. "Yes Art transcends itself in each form and thus becomes itself, a sensual, uninhibited, beautiful and above all affirmative expression of the times we live in or don't live in," he has said, in his Yes manifesto. "Jasper Johns once said, 'Sometimes I see it and then paint it. Other times I paint it and then see it.' Although this statement was made only five years ago, it sounds archaic today. A Yes Artist doesn't necessarily have to see anything or paint anything. A work of art can be made merely by coming across an object that strikes an artist's fancy, and by signing it, he can

make it into art. Yes Art is because it has to be and for no other reason."

There are, inevitably, skeptics. A reporter from Time magazine walked into the gallery the other day and demanded: "Who are you kidding?" Art News, the bible of the art world, has refused to review the Yes show.

But, slowly, Yes Art is winning followers. A man offered Cenedella \$250 last week for his "Souperman."

"I'm asking \$400," Cenedella said, "but I'm willing to bargain."

Cenedella, who is 27 and a former student of George Grosz at the Art Students League, came to Yes Art only recently. "Before I became a Yes Artist," he said, "I did still lifes and social commentary, which I've outgrown as all serious artists must."

He realizes that he may make a great deal of money from Yes Art and he has plans for the money. "I'm thinking of going back to art school," he said.

Cenedella and the gallery's owner, Ed Fitzgerald, have both contributed work to the show. Fitzgerald's masterwork is a copy of Joseph Alber's classic "Homage to the Square"—a square inside a square inside a square—with a moustache painted upon it.

Fitzgerald and Cenedella together show a piece of living sculpture for the show. Her name is Sophia Glickman, a likely story, and she will be displayed on a couch. They are asking \$2.3 million for her, to match the record for Rembrandt's "Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer."

Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Leo Castelli and dozens of other suitable representatives of Pop and Op have been invited to the opening tomorrow evening. "We want them to visit our camp," said Cenedella.