

ART/OMI 1993

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photographs by Ross Willows except where noted

ART/OMI

ART/OMI is a not-for-profit art foundation based in Omi, Columbia County, in New York's historic upper Hudson River Valley. Its principal focus is a Workshop to which artists from around the world are invited for a three week period every July. The Workshop offers participants a unique opportunity to interact with other artists representing a variety of cultures and backgrounds. In addition, ART/OMI is the home of the writers' workshop at Ledig House (named for the late German publisher, H.M. Ledig-Rowohlt). In spring and again in fall, Ledig House (which also serves as the main residence for artists during the workshop session) opens its doors to twelve established writers drawn from around the world.

In an age riven with increasing factionalism and tribalism, ART/OMI hopes to contribute to international understanding and tolerance by providing a cultural forum in which diverse ideas and perspectives about art and life can be shared.

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ART/OMI

PARTICIPANTS, 1993

Grimanesa Amoros
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Dominique Figarella
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Atsushi Yamaguchi
Vladimir Jan Zakrzewski



Photo by Margaret P. Evans

Raphael Rubinstein, Critic-in-Residence

THOUGHTS ON JULY, 1993

Most of the art audience sees the work only once it has been completed. Those who have cause to visit artists' studios — art critics, for instance — are sometimes privileged to glimpse a painting or sculpture before it is finished. (The occasionally unsettling contrast between the work-in-progress and the completed piece in the museum is beautifully captured in Frank O'Hara's famous poem "Why I Am Not A Painter.") What is rarer is to be able to watch a work being made day by day. For me, as a critic, this was one of the unexpected pleasures of my residence at ART/OMI. Although I'd been to countless studios, I'd never had the opportunity to watch artists work day after day, to regularly see paintings and sculptures on their circuitous routes to completion, or abandonment. Wandering through the studios in the ART/OMI barn, I sometimes felt like a hospital intern checking the status of the various patients, seeing what had happened to them overnight. Usually the news was good — "patient improving," "vital signs steady" — though sometimes the artist-surgeons had ruthlessly destroyed what I'd seen the day before.

A second thing I was unprepared for was how fast an incredibly diverse group of artists established a common language, even if only to explain their differences and disagreements to each other. Before the first week was over some twenty artists from six continents, several generations and a startling number of aesthetic positions and backgrounds were able to develop a context for exchange. I think I realized the extent of this context the night a painter from New York came up to Omi to give a talk about his work. It was not an easy evening. The audience reacted strongly against what they perceived as the painter's overly narrow focus. It was thrilling to me how, informally and intuitively, the participants in ART/OMI had already invented their own way of addressing art, an approach that rejected strongly ideological stances, that rejected the notion of the correct aesthetic position.

It wasn't that the artists at Omi expected to always be in total agreement with each other, but that they decided to learn from, or at least look carefully at, artists very unlike themselves. I need hardly say that this is quite different from how things are

in the — I won't say "real" — larger world. The last 30 years have witnessed a steady fragmentation of the art world to the point where there is little sense of community and still less sense of common purpose left. Artists have, most of them, entrenched themselves in cramped, heavily fortified positions, jealous of whatever aesthetic territory they hold.

At ART/OMI it quickly became clear to everyone that such an attitude was a waste of time. In the resulting atmosphere of hard work and open exchange, one could believe that art was still an occasion for personal generosity.

To be honest, I must add that much of what made ART/OMI so worthwhile happened outside of the studios and had no apparent connection to visual art, activities as various as watching a South African gumboot dance, losing chess games to Eastern Europeans, driving 4-wheel drive vehicles over rough tracks in order to reach pristine landscapes.

Like those paintings and sculptures I saw day-by-day over three intense weeks of July 1993, ART/OMI is itself a work-in-progress. Newborn, unpredictable, oriented towards the future, constantly discovering its own possibilities, it's a thing whose growth one wants to watch intently.

*Raphael Rubinstein,
Critic-in-Residence*



GRIMANESA AMOROS

PERU/U.S.A.

We are always in continuous change;
The only thing that never changes
is change itself. I'm living and creating
in this process of change called: ART.



Twilight, acrylic on canvas, 68" X 60"

Photo by Eric Guttentwitz



ART/OMI

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