

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

ALLAN MORROW: The Art Periodical Collage Series

As one of San Diego's best known artists in the 1970s and 1980s, Allan Morrow's visually stunning paintings – abstractions grounded in landscape – were among the most memorable art created locally and exhibited internationally during those decades. The 1980s were especially productive for the artist. His works were included in dozens of prestigious gallery and museum exhibitions in the United States and abroad, and in the years from 1984 to 1988 he exhibited with the Bullmoose Group. Described by one critic as "urban art guerillas," members of the Bullmoose Group included San Diego-area artists Ron Williams, Eric Christian, Stuart Burton, Tom Frankovich, and Morrow. After an absence of nearly twenty years from the city's art scene, Morrow recently reemerged with a new body of work, his "Fence Series" mixed-media constructions, in which he reinterpreted earlier themes while taking them in a fresh and surprisingly different direction. These works are on view in a critically acclaimed solo exhibition at the Earl & Birdie Taylor/Pacific Beach Branch Library through June 19.

Morrow began the "Art Periodical Collage Series" in late 2002; then put the project on hold until 2007. Within a year, he had amassed a total of 163 collages. The raw materials for these works were illustrations for advertisements, reviews, and articles that appeared in major art journals from 1975 to 1993, including *Arts*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, and *ArtNews*. Morrow was especially intrigued by the concept of recycling art magazines into works of art, and that these works could be made relatively inexpensively.

Perhaps the most engaging aspect about Morrow's collages is that they are unusually dynamic and graphically powerful for their size; the visual equivalent of the jazz he listened to while creating them. (Excluding the archival backings on which the collages are mounted, they rarely exceed four or five inches in any dimension.) In these works, Morrow's primary interest is color, composition, the interplay of shapes and textures, repetition, and other formal concerns. He pulls this off impeccably, not only in terms of beautifully resolved aesthetics, but also flawless craftsmanship. Making these works even more impressive is that the artist designed them "on the fly." That is, Morrow improvised as he selected and cut apart the images he found in the art magazines, with no preliminary sketching or preplanning. He admits, however, that "some of the collages came together more easily than others." Following common practice in contemporary art, Morrow preferred not to give lyrical or expressive titles to these works; instead assigning them catalogue-like descriptions, such as *Artforum, November 1978* (2008) and *Art in America, September 1989* (2007), based on the titles and dates of the magazines from which the images were taken.

Beyond the purely visual appeal of these collages, anyone familiar with art or art history will enjoy seeing well known or stylistically recognizable works of art deconstructed and reassembled into new ones. In studying the relationships of the collaged fragments to one another, viewers may also decipher subtle visual puns or other thought-provoking juxtapositions of elements. For the most part, these were intentional, but, in some instances, it was months or years before Morrow realized that his subconscious had been at work. Like his "Fence Series" constructions, Morrow's "Art Periodical Collage Series" have never been exhibited and are completely unknown to the general public. They are a delightful discovery.

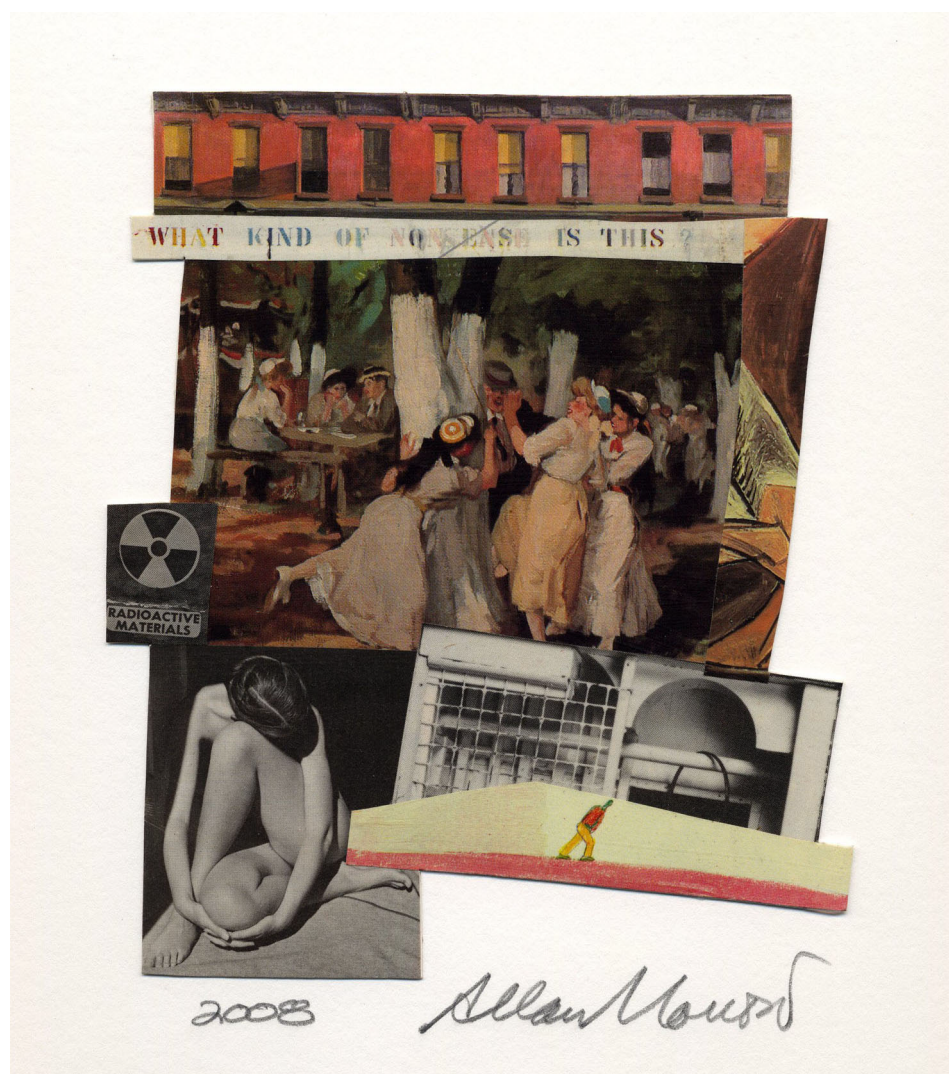
– Mark-Elliott Lugo, June 2010

WHAT IS COLLAGE?

The term *collage* comes from the French verb *coller* (to glue). In English, it is both a verb and a noun: 'to collage' is to affix papers or objects to a two-dimensional surface, thus creating a collage. Collage techniques were developed in China as early as 200 BC with the invention of paper. It was adapted to the fine arts about 1912-13, when Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque began to incorporate into their Cubist paintings a wide variety of ordinary materials (newspaper clippings, tickets, folded paper, pieces of wood and glass, wire, sand, etc.) selected primarily because they offered new mediums with which to represent planes and textures. After World War I, Dada artists transformed debris from the street into their sometimes disturbing and politicized collages, while Surrealist artists created collages that reflected their more psychologically attuned sensibilities. German Dada artists also invented a collage technique using snippets of photographs that is known as *photomontage*. Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), a German painter, sculptor, designer, and writer who was prominent in the European avant garde, is generally acknowledged as the twentieth century's greatest master of collage.

Postwar collage has been put to many different uses. Jasper Johns painted his images of flags and targets on backgrounds of collaged newspaper in order to produce richly textured, gestural-looking surfaces. Pattern and decoration artists such as Miriam Shapiro, Robert Kushner, and Kim MacConnel have used collage to create brashly colorful and sensuous effects. Other postwar artists who have exploited the technique include Romare Bearden, Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, Richard Hamilton, George Herms, David Hockney, Jess, Howardena Pindell, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, Betye Saar, and Lucas Samaras. The sources of their collage materials range from magazine ads and maps to trash and old clothes.

The above description of collage was adapted from Robert Atkins' *Artspeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords* (Abbeville Press, 1990) and Ralph Mayer's *A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques* (Barnes & Noble Books, 1981.)



The San Diego Public Library's Visual Arts Program is a nationally recognized series of exhibitions, lectures, a television program, and other art-related activities. The mission of the Program is to demonstrate the Library's role as a cultural institution embracing a broad range of disciplines, while assisting San Diego's mid-career and older professional artists in achieving wider local, regional, and national attention. Visual Arts Program exhibitions are made possible, in part, by contributions from individuals, volunteer efforts, and the Friends of Central Library. For more information about the Morrow exhibition, or tax-deductible contributions to the Visual Arts Program, please contact Library Curator Mark-Elliott Lugo at (619) 238-6627.

Image at left:
ALLAN MORROW *ArtNews* May 1980 #2 (2008)