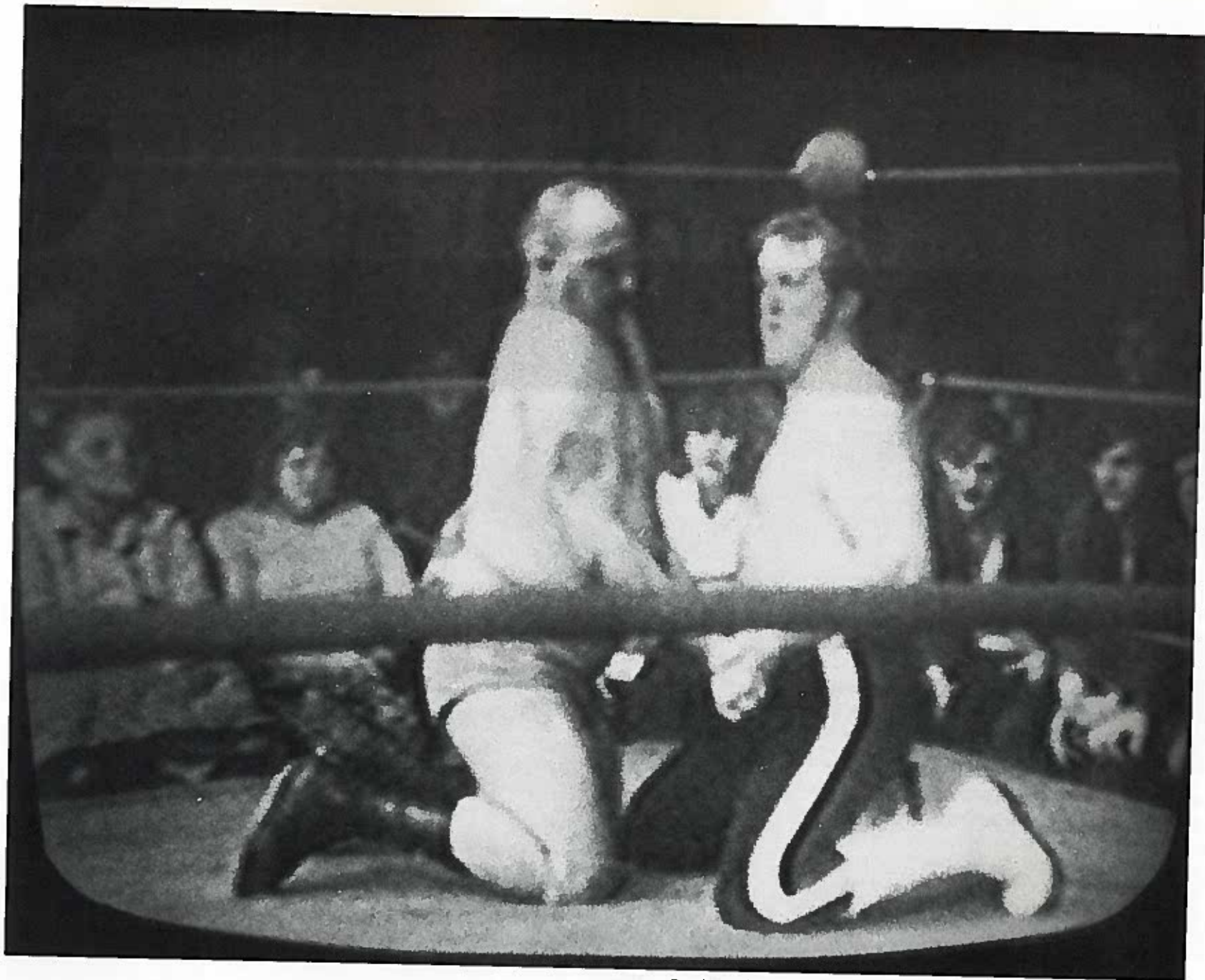


DOUGLAS HUEBLER

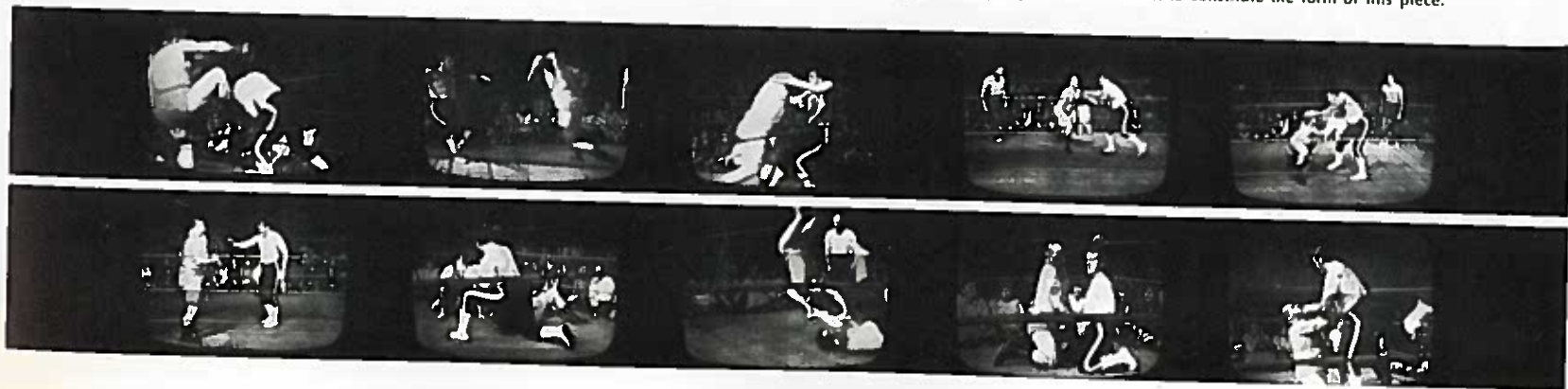




Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece #60*, Bradford, Massachusetts, October, 1971.

On October 24, 1971, at exact 10 second intervals, photographic documentation was made of 15 specific instants during the televised *Big Time Wrestling* contest between "The Stumper" (255 pounds) and Tim Brooks (257 pounds).

Two photographs were selected, by "chance," to characterize instants of the contest that were: "the most convincing," and "the least convincing." 17 photographs join this statement to constitute the form of this piece.



APRIL KINGSLEY

As I intend my work to say, this is the way I feel the world is—that it can be refreshed; that it is open to re-negotiation; that it can be original again—by releasing us from some of the models of reality that have been pressed upon us that may no longer be relevant.

—Douglas Huebler

Huebler's evolution to a cogent and seminal position within the Conceptual art movement was made in large, sure steps that exactly paralleled reductivist developments during the '60s. He was a painter until 1962 when he began pushing his geometrical paintings out from the wall into reliefs. These were followed by modular, formica-covered, wood constructions. Usually white, blocky, open units that he placed directly on the floor, they shared one rather unique feature — they "worked" in any position having no "right side up." Each piece was wholly perceivable from any view, embodying the "gestalt" concept of Minimalist sculpture which utilizes nonanthropomorphic, repeatable, geometric forms to establish a complex sculptural idea in the perceiver's mind with holistic immediacy.

The medium of sculpture continued to be a viable vehicle for Huebler until 1967 when he made the next logical and radical step into the elimination of objective manifestations to convey sculptural ideas. Instead, in the *Site Sculptures* of 1967-68, he used small innocuous markers placed at real points in the world so spatially disparate that they couldn't be experienced perceptually. The locations of these markers were documented by words, maps, diagrams, and photographs, and the sculptural ideas existed only by analogy in the minds of persons viewing the documentation.

Though a number of other artists seemed to make this jump into Conceptualized art with Huebler or shortly thereafter, few were as clear-sighted and rigorous as he in their approach. Using photographs, for instance, as "dumb" copying and identifying devices he pointed in the direction of an ideated reality, but never documented an actually existing sculpture. Many of the earth artists, like Heizer and Smithson, did use photographs in this latter way, however, and produced a great deal of confusion about the nature of Conceptual art as a result. In a very similar way performance-Conceptualists like Van Saun muddied the waters of the medium/message pool by utilizing photographs to record specific events. Just as Huebler understood



In November, 1971, a number of photographs were made in New York City to document various aspects of "everyone alive"; from those one was selected to represent:

MORE THAN ONE PERSON WHO MAY NEVER KNOW THAT HIS, OR HER, EXISTENCE HAS BEEN MADE THE SUBJECT OF ART.

During November, 1971, from among a number of photographs made in New York City to document aspects of "everyone alive," one was chosen to represent:
PEOPLE WHO LOOK ALIKE.



Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece #70 (In Process) Global*, 1971. Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in this manner.

Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: "100,000 people," "1,000,000 people," "10,000,000 people," "people personally known by the artist," "look-alikes," "over-laps," etc.

That photograph and a contact proof print join with this statement to constitute the form of this work: 5/ *Variable Piece #70*: 1971.



clearly the necessity to maintain the generalized nature of his documentation, he also realized that it was essential to resist allowing his documentation and photographs to become things of intrinsic esthetic merit and therefore loaded with a *priori* art meanings. The work of what might be termed the neonaturalist Conceptualists, such as Hans Hollein, Roger Cutforth, and Hilla and Bernd Becher, plugs into the circuits of past art and accumulates an esthetic rationale as a result. Huebler avoids this natural temptation to take "good" photographs by stratagems which are based on choice-negating procedures or by having others (nonartists) take his photographs.

One final set of distinctions remains to be made in order to distinguish Huebler's work from that of his fellow Conceptualists. This distinction concerns his use of language. He incorporates carefully chosen, simple descriptive language within the body of each of his pieces. What he writes is clearly not poetry, but it is also nonphilosophical. There is, of course, a sturdy philosophical underpinning to his work but, unlike the linguistic Conceptualists (Joseph Kosuth and the Art-Language group) who are involved with defining and refining the nature of art verbally, Huebler uses language to make his intentions explicit, to instruct his viewer about the particular conceptual model of reality he is establishing within a given piece — not as a self-sufficient medium for his art ideas.

Lastly, when all the particulars of his pieces — diagrams, maps, photographs, drawings, and words — are assembled for exhibition in an art context, they are packaged additively in simple, two-dimensional formats. His noncompositional, nonqualitative bias, which was fully expressed in his former Minimal sculpture, functions now to separate him from those Conceptualists who fall into the familiar trap of "composing" their finished products. Huebler's resultant image is close to something like a classroom demonstration panel or a civic activities notice board in its bland, unstressed look. Since contentless form is inconceivable, these formats do carry intimations of didacticism, but this is intentional. Huebler views the history of 20th-century art as having been, at least in part, increasingly concerned with the didactic.

Consideration of Huebler's subject matter establishes that the same biases operative in the formal aspects of his work function in this regard as well. Whatever place he points toward in his *Location Pieces*, or time set he distinguishes in his *Duration Pieces*, or situation he examines in his *Variable Pieces*, is never inherently superior to any others he might have chosen. His subjects have little intrinsic interest, and no specific psychological, sociological, or philosophical base to support their meaning. Information is implied by analogy; it is never directly supplied. The works are carefully structured to be open-ended so that the viewer must fill in the content himself. Huebler provides only es-

sential factual information which will convey his conceptual model without altering or commenting upon the particular system being utilized.

Huebler's work operates connotatively, rather than denotatively. His *Secrets Piece* at the Jewish Museum in 1970 (where anyone writing a true secret on the forms Huebler provided would receive another's secret in return), and *Duration Piece #15 — Global*, 1969 (involving the collector and/or the viewer in an FBI search for a bank robber) have extensive psychological overtones. Other works, like *Variable Piece #11, Rowley, Massachusetts* of 1971 (in which students surveyed the occupants of 36 houses in the town to find out "Who lives here?" and "What do they do?") carry loaded sociological implications. Recent works which involve photographing people's faces at the moment they are told something about the way they look are emotionally connotative. His Conceptual models vary greatly in the extensiveness of their implied experiences in direct ratio to the focus he has chosen and the range of the particular system being utilized, but they are all loaded with meaningful overtones for the viewer. Huebler clearly intends his work to move people; to be multileveled and profound; to bring the viewer to an awareness of the ongoing continuum surrounding him, while avoiding everything that will confuse the issue of what he wants his work to do. The scope of his work has broadened considerably over the years, and one of his current pieces, which is entitled *Variable Piece #70 — Global* (exhibited in various "editions" all over Europe this spring and at Castelli Downtown in May), intends to encompass all the people alive in the world before its "completion" at the end of the artist's lifetime. The various categories or topics under which he includes whole segments of the population — "at least one person the artist may know personally," "look-alikes," "more than one person who may never know that his existence has been made the subject of art," etc. — are enigmatic because of their deliberate triteness. One reacts to these "portraits" with varying degrees of interest, emotion, and calculation depending upon the particular framework he has set up to surround them. But eventually the artifice of his fabrication begins to hold even more interest than the specifics he has led the viewer to believe were the keys to the meaning of the work. Huebler's latest pieces represent an open-ended culmination of that scrupulously considered synthesis of rigorous ideology and connotative extensibility which has enabled him to occupy a truly unique position in the Conceptual movement. He has succeeded in his endeavor to accomplish the goal William Blake set when he wrote that, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything could appear to man as it is, infinite." ■



Douglas Huebler, *Truro Series #2*, formica over wood, 40" high, 1966-67. 3'4" x 9' x 4'.