



John White's Back *Celebrating the opening of a new SYLVIA WHITE GALLERY in Ventura*

Sylvia White, whose art galleries in Santa Monica and New York City established her reputation in the art world, has staked out two new art spaces in Ventura. Sticking her toe in this beachside community's water (literally!) with the improbable purchase of a car wash, she characteristically transformed a mundane cement drive-through into an "Art Happening" - a transformation welcomed by the City of Ventura in their redevelopment plans for "California's New Art City."

Of course Sylvia's imagination was aimed far beyond an artistically quirky car wash. On May 10th she revealed a sophisticated art space at 1783 Main Street. The architecturally forward structure was built in the 1950's. Ted Egidi renovated the building, revealing old brick walls and massive wood structural beams in a beautifully arching 2-story ceiling. The dramatic interior reminds you of a New York artist's loft. Sylvia plans to offer fine art and serigraph printing and have up to four working loft spaces for artists in addition to the exhibit space. You can expect Sylvia to bring the work of art luminaries such as Robert Rauschenberg and others to add awareness of important contemporary art in Ventura.

Naturally, her husband John White's artwork will be a star attraction. A recent May 10th gallery event coincided with John's seventy-first birthday and he took center stage with a performance art piece. It was a rare treat. His concept and execution were flawless and deeply moving. He opened the evening with a passionate elegy to a young boxer who unexpectedly died as a result of a boxing match. For his performance art piece, John first appeared in semi-darkness, facing a cement block wall, his head covered with a prisoner's black hood. With obvious reference to recent tortures of the Iraq war, we watched him sway and heard his muffled keening, the mourning sounds softly reverberating against the cement walls. The lights came up and he spun to face the audience, stepping purposefully into a boxing stance as he began exorcising the dead boxer's martyrdom with powerful

feints and jabs. Watching a man about to celebrate 71 years of life, punching at demons that abruptly ended the life of a young athlete, was as dramatic as anything I have ever seen on stage. Moving into his own version of a ceremonial cleansing rite, he roughly doused his face in water from a stainless steel bowl which became a kind of sacred baptismal font. Once "cleansed," he struck the bowl lightly ten times, mimicking the final fight countdown. It made a thin hollow sound; Zen-like and still a death nell.

Blurring the boundary between metaphors and reality, John turned from his battle with unknown demons to reach for a tool guaranteed to connect him to the creative joy that informs and sustains his life: a piece of chalk. He began talking to The Wall again, this time as though he were engaged in a flirtation with his muse. John's rapid chalk lines drew our eyes to unlikely patches and scratches in the old cement wall with funny commentary that elicited images of plein air Cascades, Jackson Pollack and even a dose of Viagra which, of course, explained the protruding rebar! You could learn to love that wall just watching him work —and you didn't need to be told when to laugh!

* John White's work was seminal to the development of performance art in California until his retirement in 1986 to focus on his paintings and drawings. During his 20 year performance career, he performed publicly at The Guggenheim Museum, New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Pasadena Art Museum, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, La Foret Museum, Tokyo, UBC in Canada, Gallerie Doyle in Paris and hundreds of other public spaces. He is the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Grant, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art New Talent Award in 1971, CETA Grant and Djerassi Fellowship. His paintings and drawings are represented in several permanent museum collections. He has emerged from his performance art retirement only twice in the past 20 years. In 1989, he was commissioned by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department to do a special piece at the Music Center, "the Annotated Lipshitz, and in 1995 he was invited to do a piece at the Cleveland Institute of Art Performance Art Festival.