

# Un-Control Freak

By Kyle Gann

**Rolywholyover A Circus**  
Dary John Mizelle

**Rolywholyover A Circus** revolves around John Cage's personality in a way his music never did, and the more it refers to him, the less it seems like him. As you enter the Soho Guggenheim's second floor, the first objects that capture your attention seem un-Cagean: a chamber pot, a Garibaldi red shirt, an 18th-century wall hanging, a video of a 1961 Ernie Kovacs show. Their juxtaposition might bring Cage's friend Rauschenberg to mind, but aside from their unfamiliar context (they were borrowed from local museums and placed according to chance procedures) they aren't superimposed or altered. The center two cabinets are filled with books, not chosen by Cage, but all relevant to his education and career; surely Cage would have created a library through chance processes, but given the rest of this exhibition's premises, perhaps not.

The title of the show (which runs until July 31) officially contains four spaces (no colon) between *Rolywholyover* and *A Circus*, forcing every critic in town to plead with his editor to get it typeset correctly. From this point on, arbitrary control is the underlying current. In Gallery C we're at the mercy of an absurdist Mussolini who is making the trains run on—his, not our—time. Cage selected (how unlike him!) 160 artworks made by his friends and associates

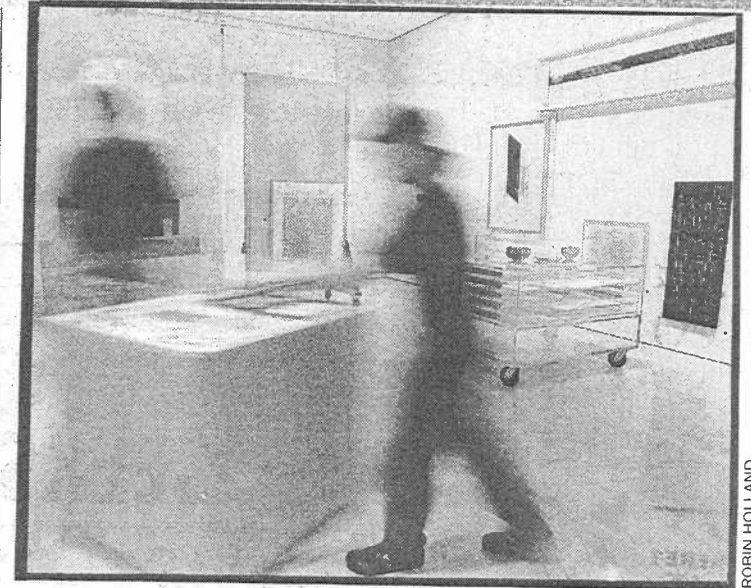
to be placed in the gallery for durations and in spots determined via *I Ching*. The preparators become performers, almost continually taking down one piece of art and putting up another. Only Cage could have turned a static art exhibition into theater. And yet, the works not nominally on view are still visible obliquely, hanging from metal storage walls. Gallery B offers Cage's own prints and drawings, some of them chance-hung so high that you crane your neck to glimpse them. Great riches are here but you only get to look at a few of them. (One holy relic you can look at, behind glass, is an actual volume of Thoreau's original journal.)

I think I had a musician's response. It now seems natural (for some of us, anyway) to apply the dictatorial rigors of chance to the inexhaustible wealth of potential sounds, and when Cage screws up a Schubert symphony with the *I Ching*, well, I need only pop in the CD later to restore the work's integrity. But when I see something similar happen to paintings by artists I'm barely familiar with (Cage's own ink pieces included), I feel shortchanged on experiences I can't easily duplicate. Which shows, I suppose, the extent to which Cage is tinkering with my museum expectations. I want to feel that, mentally, art is something I can come to own, and Dad insists that I attend to the experience of being there, not the ownership. (Cage has been reappearing in my dreams as a ghostly, white, unspeaking yet beneficent

father figure. Surely I'm not alone in this.)

Adding to the contradictions, *Rolywholyover* is dotted with exhibits Cage didn't curate: Plexiglas shelves filled with correspondence to and from Cage, pages of scores by composers he was close to, memorabilia, all reminding us poignantly of the immense, still-living art continuum Cage was tapped into. Intimate moments leap out: a postcard from his ex-wife Xenia, written three decades after their divorce, compliments his latest music, saying, "I think you have achieved what your dear father always hoped:—to see through fog." Such objects focus us on Cage's incredible personality just as the exhibition as a whole is trying to focus on something much larger than personality. Half curatorial experiment, half memorial, *Rolywholyover* feels like an unfinished symphony, its final pages filled in by a hand more reverent than kindred.

**I was disappointed**, arriving at Lotus Fine Arts May 14, to find that the promised evening of Dary John Mizelle's music was to consist of only three violin solos and a violin duet. I underestimated Mizelle. An old *Source* magazine editor who studied with Stockhausen, Gaburo's David Tudor, and other greats, Mizelle is a die-hard experimentalist of a kind found mainly in the Midwest and Southern California: one who took post-serialism as a grand metaphor, an excuse to fuse conceptualism with complex technique. A creator of



Curating by chance at *Rolywholyover*

ROBIN HOLLAND

wide-ranging, earthy soundworlds, he is also an undeservedly obscure victim of New York's ruthless bias against composers who didn't achieve a reputation by age 40.

It's usually difficult to get an idea of a composer's range from solo nonkeyboard works, and that was half true here. Two pieces played by violinist Mia Wu, *Elegy* and *Sun/The Gentle (The Penetrating Wind)* were gestural, raspyly meditative and not terribly communicative, though the latter's form converged on a delicate tonal melody repeated over and over. *Amore*, however, which Wu performed with Laura Seaton of the Sirius Quartet, sustained a high degree of tension via carefully drawn dissonant counterpoint. Wu would pluck while Seaton bowed and vice versa, and though the activity never became frenetic, the rhythmic character changed continually over 20 minutes with

endless imagination.

The final *Violin Fantasy*, though, upped the intensity level exponentially. Scraps of music were taped all over Lotus's small stage: on the floor, on a stepladder, on the fronds of a potted plant. Wearing a white bodysuit, Wu wound her way around the stage for well over a half hour, always playing, sometimes stomping, sometimes sitting on the floor, now swooping and bending in motions choreographed for the work by Megan Brazil. With characteristic visionary impracticality, Mizelle had written *Violin Fantasy* in 1975 and couldn't find anyone to play it until Wu offered to in 1988. Wu, incidentally, has just returned to performance after a couple of years she spent as an aerobics instructor. Good thing: no less athletic violinist could have survived Mizelle's body-racking vision. ■

YOSUKE YAMASHITA/DAZZLING DAYS

PHIL COLLINS  
Face Value

A Summer of  
Bonnie