

The Coatpuller

John Sinclair

1966

Progress Report: The first reorganizational meeting of the Artists' Workshop Society took place as scheduled on November 22, with encouraging results. That is to say, enough people expressed working interest in continuing the work of the Society that the Artists' Workshop will endure—and, hopefully, keep growing.

The Workshop is important, beyond its individual actions, because it represents the first step in the eventual take over by artists of their living and working conditions. In this same issue of the 5th Estate, Frank Kofsky describes the jazz club scene as it exists in America, in all its stink and decay. The club-owners have insured that the really vital human music of our time will not get to the people it is meant for, simply by denying the new musicians a place to work and make their work public. What is to be kept in mind is that the whole club-entertainment scene in America is totally decadent and anti-human and should be destroyed as soon as possible, and it can be destroyed by a refusal on the part of the artists to have anything to do with it.

Cecil Taylor called for such a boycott over a year ago in DOWNBEAT magazine, but musicians stupidly still keep trying to get into that scene, looking only as far ahead as next weekend. What is necessary is that musicians—and finally, all artists—establish their own context, make their own performing conditions, and gather together all their supporters and interested people in cooperatives whereby the people who need the music make its public presentation their own responsibility.

No one is going to get rich this way, and it's a hard struggle at first, if not always. But it can't be any other way. And by taking these things into their own hands, artists also become more and more involved in the life of their communities and can grow as artists and as human beings, accordingly. The separation and compartmentalization of artists has contributed heavily to their present abysmal condition, and only by emerging as TOTAL HUMAN BEINGS as an active force in the community can we take over our own lives.

The Detroit Artists' Workshop was organized over two years ago as a means to correct the prevalent anti-human situation contemporary artists have been stuck with. A group of (mostly) poets and musicians secured their own physical facilities, a house on West Forest which was subsequently, nine months later, burned out, and started presenting weekly free concerts and readings controlled wholly by the member artists.

Poetry, film, dance, and drawing workshops were set up and run cooperatively by members of the Society, and all economic details were taken care of by members. Publicity likewise. Thus the Artists' Workshop literally made truly contemporary poetry & music possible in Detroit by establishing a context within which such art could come about. It was realized, after much frustration and consternation, that no one else would stir themselves, or come out of their greed bags long enough, to provide for the young new artists, make a place for them, etc., so the members of the Society took matters into their own hands and went straight ahead from there.

A printing cooperative was set up, magazines were edited and printed by members of the Society, and a series of Workshop Books began whereby the poets in the community could make their work public in a more lasting context than readings. Concerts were arranged and performed by the musician members, a housing cooperative was conceived and realized, people came and went, participating while they were here and spreading the word about the Artists' Workshop as they traveled.

People got married, went to jail, got jobs, quit them, moved around, but the community somehow maintained itself. Now, at this point in our history, a time of huge change and widening consciousness among the general populace of the city, especially the young people, the remaining members of the Society want desperately to expand the base of the operation and take in more young artists, so that all of us can explore the possibilities for really vital art in Detroit.

But as always, a hard core of participating people is needed—there are many diverse functions to be performed: publicity, printing, maintenance of the Workshop and the printshop, financial management, etc.—and anyone who is truly interested can take part. And in order to get outside the general entertainment-jazz club-moviehouse morass, the non-performing artists (the diggers and lovers) have to realize that they are equal with the performers as human beings, and that it is their responsibility to help their brothers establish and maintain such a context as the Artists' Workshop has proved itself to be.

The November 22 meeting was encouraging—among other things, a publicity and membership committee was organized, and some of the younger musicians have determined to start the weekly happenings on Sundays at the Workshop again. There will also be weekly membership-planning meetings, on Tuesday nights at 8:00 p.m., which are always open to new people. And as always, EVERYONE is invited to attend and take part.

THIS IS OUR CITY, goddammit, and we have to start acting like we know that. The only thing that will stop us will be our own apathy and ignorance—nothing else will. Human energy in its purest form—LOVE—is so strong it can carry us all through. The Artists' Workshop is located at 4857 John Lodge, off the corner of Warren, and it's YOUR place. Please use it well.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #19, December 1-15, 1966

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