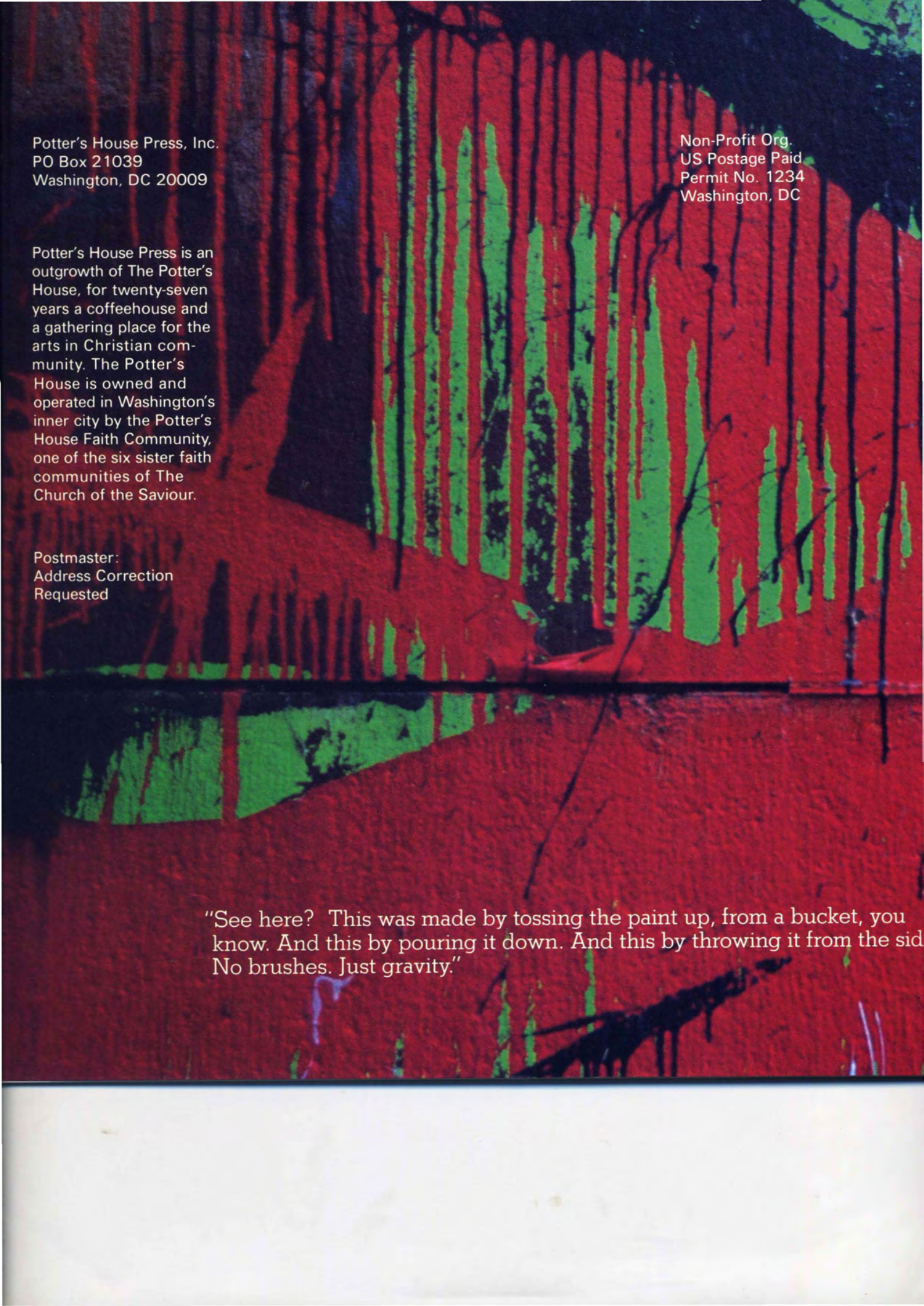


An abstract artwork featuring a vibrant background of green, blue, and red paint splatters. A prominent black silhouette of a person is positioned in the center, with numerous black paint drips falling from it. The overall style is expressive and urban.

Street Beat: The Art of the Street

Potter's House Press

The background of the entire page is an abstract artwork. It features a dense pattern of vertical stripes in red and green, with black paint dripping down the sides and across the stripes. The overall effect is one of dynamic, gravity-driven movement.

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"See here? This was made by tossing the paint up, from a bucket, you know. And this by pouring it down. And this by throwing it from the side. No brushes. Just gravity."

Street Beat:
The Art of the Street

Some-

thing

Rise



Dear Reader,

This is our neighborhood: Adams Morgan, the inner city neighborhood of The Potter's House.

It is a dirty neighborhood: trash underfoot, soot, broken glass, abandoned buildings.

It is a noisy neighborhood: car horns blare and brakes squeal, boom boxes blast rap, reggae, salsa, heavy metal, and voices, when you can hear them, insult, laugh, and chatter in a tangle of world languages.

It is a smelly neighborhood: chili peppers, cheap whiskey, sweat, stale urine, frying chicken, exhaust fumes.

It presses in, this neighborhood.

There are days, particularly in summer, when it assaults. If you live here or come here often, in self defense you develop an armor, scales on your eyes, ears, nose and mouth. You go hard to shelter sanity.

Wendy Belcher, the author of this issue, lives here too. But she walks the streets with her head up, nose sniffing. Inviting this sensory assault.

Wendy loves the streets, particularly in summer when the moist heat breeds odors, sounds, crowds—signs of life, Wendy says. Under ugly surfaces she detects subtle beauty. Beneath garish and outlandish acts she senses poignancy. Within the only ordinary she sees the miraculous.

Like the blind man touched by Jesus, the artist is someone whose senses, stripped of scales, are tender, startled by the world, surprised.

In this issue we invite you to walk these streets with Wendy, exposed. With her, look, smell, listen, feel—the surprise.

Gayle Boss

The buses

are panting in the heat. Light sears the row of storefronts, fading their signs and clouding the dusty windows. From the shadow of a repair shop, someone lifts a lazy arm in greeting. The tarmac sinks beneath my heels as I cross the street.

"It's off 14th," Striker had said, giving me only his street name. "Between E and F. You think someone's following you, but when you look back, some dude's drawn a shadow on the wall."

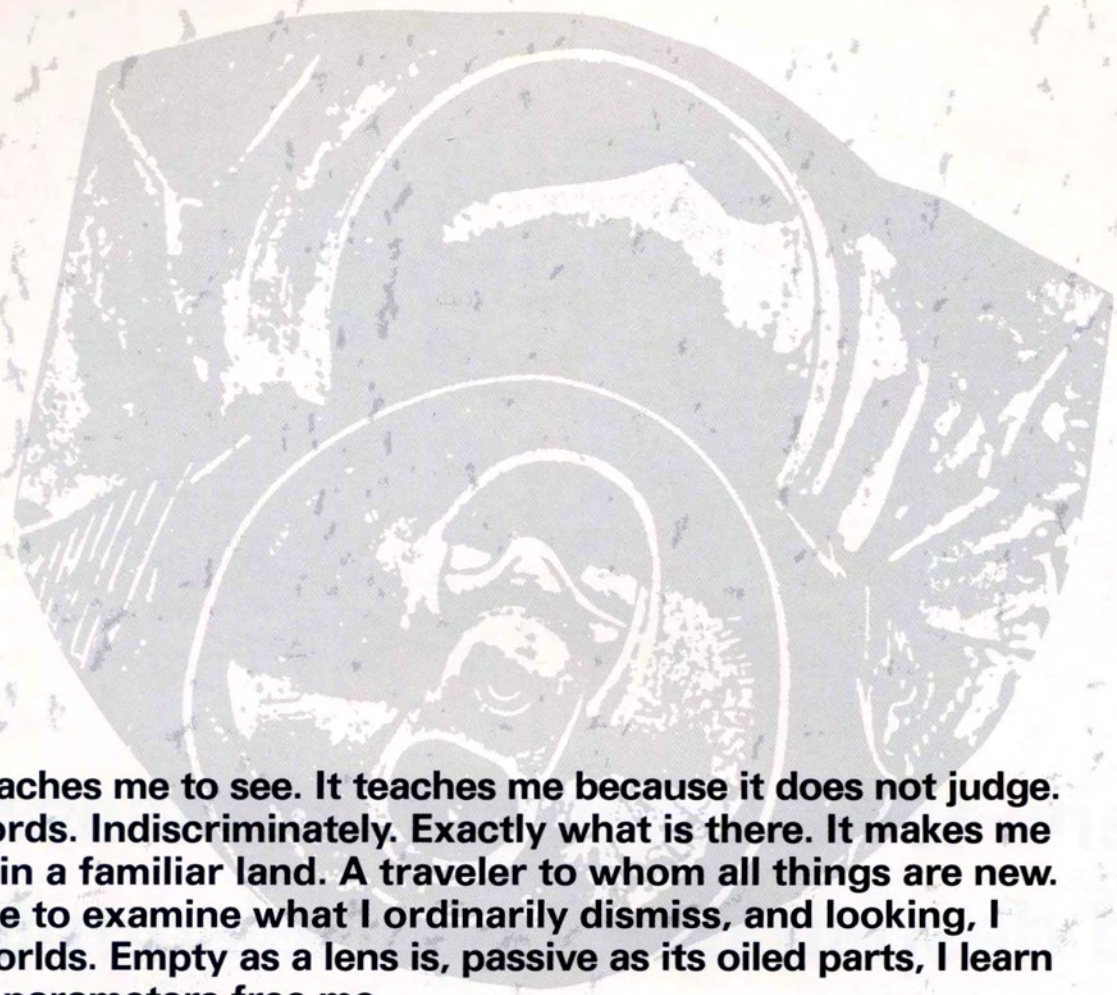
I turn off the street into an alley. The sound of the traffic recedes behind me. Weeds poke up among the broken bottles. Between the buildings, the sky is a strip of chrome.

I find an abandoned hub cap, but no shadow. I shift my camera bag higher. Perhaps off E street. I turn a corner, then another, and suddenly, down low—where one could work under cover of a car—appear the words "Street Beat." A pulse on the anatomy of the city.

At night I dream of Cyclops—his eye huge, centered, a vacuum toward which all rushes. During the day, I resemble him—this lens above my silent mouth. Absorbing.

Later, I am checking out abandoned subway entrances. Through my viewfinder appear names which I pan by. Into sight slides a skull and phallus. I continue panning, dismissing this as pornographic and crudely drawn, but then stop. I return to it, the camera cutting off all else but this image, forcing me to examine what is really there. Sandwiched together, the two archetypes scream the links we have forged between sexuality and death. Click.





The lens teaches me to see. It teaches me because it does not judge. It only records. Indiscriminately. Exactly what is there. It makes me a stranger in a familiar land. A traveler to whom all things are new. It forces me to examine what I ordinarily dismiss, and looking, I discover worlds. Empty as a lens is, passive as its oiled parts, I learn from it. Its parameters free me.

Heading home, I pass the supermarket. Safeway looms in a neighborhood of family grocery stores. A street person wearing a batter's helmet sits on the store window ledge, repeatedly throwing a baseball into his mitt. I am almost past when he greets me. Looking back to respond, I see the graffiti on the side of the store. "Peace," it says, the connected letters plump. Below it, insistent: "Peace!!!" I stop, turn, and have my camera to my eye before I see that at the bottom of the wall a man is sprawled dead drunk. I hesitate and in that moment, the hand at his side rises sleepily and travels in a slow arc along the wall. It falls beside his heavy head, the fingers curled open as a child's.

**The lens telescopes life into view. Through
locked despair up close. No sorrow is spared
something blooms in this urban wasteland
can't be kept down. Something rises.**

**gh it I see this city's concrete -
ared. But I also see that
and. Something in this people**

have spent my summer on the street, an urban hunter. I began with a vague idea, little more than a fascination with how heat brings out the people of Mt. Pleasant and Adams Morgan, the neighborhoods in Washington, DC where I live. Streets deserted in winter, fill in summer. Most people here are poor—Latino refugees or Blacks who live in small rooms without air conditioning. During summer, everyone moves out onto the street.

Some of what I see is not pleasant: drunken men made maudlin with despair, work-orphaned children who eat potato chips for breakfast and dash by me at midnight. Trash litters the streets, the sound of sirens is heard more often than not, and the shops are barred with metal gates.

And yet, I remain fascinated.

Late at night, a man in a second story window glides his cue stick back and forth, then flicks it. Below him, on the street, five boys play a tape deck, the volume knob twisted all the way around. Two dance—their movements small but so crisp they mesmerize—while the others beat out rhythms on the hood of a car with their bare hands. On the steps of a row house, four women sit—each below the next—plaiting hair. Their fingers make arches, twining the hair, that their laughing mouths imitate.

In a park with concrete tables, a card game proceeds with nonchalant expertise, the youngest player receiving a stream of advice which makes him restless. Two men use such a table for chess: the one suited, briefcase at his ankle, stands; the other, with backwards baseball cap, sits and makes his move. Nearby, a man with putting iron putts a bottle cap at a plastic cup.

On a court, men play basketball, bodies braced against each other, their sightless hands feeling for their opponent half. A boy's pass, thrown from behind a parked car, is caught and carried to touchdown before another car turns into the street. Two girls wheel a jump rope, chanting as their friends jump in.

A baby is tossed and gurgles. A barber suggests a style. A woman pats a tortilla. A garden is weeded.





THIS BOY

is



DOWN

Such signs of life led me into a summer of exploration. I limited myself to the streets between 10th and 20th in the Northwest section of DC, photographing only what interested me. I named these interests: culture, art, street; popular culture, popular art, street art. Soon, however, I began to wonder if this collection of words described what I was discovering. If I was to define art in any traditional fashion, half of what I shot was not art. And half of what I did not shoot was.

I spent fifteen minutes with one of the statues erected by the city, thinking it must simply be the angle that prevented me from shooting it. But after looking at the statue from every conceivable angle, I walked away without taking a single frame. The statue wasn't badly executed. I just knew it didn't fit.

At the Hispanic festival, I photographed a man and his daughter. She was in Nicaraguan native costume. He wore a military cap, Contra buttons, and an Oliver North T-shirt. My friends allowed that clothing could be art, but they drew the line at this. He had made nothing they wore. Their clothing was about politics, not art. But I am drawn to his deliberateness, the ruffled dress on the solemn girl and the military codes all over his body. No doubt I see more than he intended. But how can so conscious an act, so blatant an act, not be art?

I immediately ran up against such questions. And I was uncomfortable with the prospect that my entire project was based on intuition alone, or worse yet, simply taste. How could I define a binding thesis as, "photographing whatever interests me"? I could only hope that there was a common denominator to what I photographed. One I hadn't found yet. One that I could find by continuing to shoot.

Everything I see, I've seen before and not at all. And what I see everywhere is graffiti. From names to insults to political commentary to drawings. The images leap from their surroundings like camouflaged guerrillas. They capture me.

ot light flattens the brick, but not the words. "Soldier's World" is scrawled across the building a children's playground. "Love Life Enough to Struggle" is lettered where the commuters pass every day. "Michael Jackson"—in a small hand—"I'm still y"—unfinished, either interrupted or forgotten. "Look out everybody," another warns sweetly.

I faithfully copy all the words I find in public places. But when I take them out at home, they have gone dull like stones brought home from the ocean. Graffiti cannot be reduced to language. Each, like a stone, shines only in its element.

"Your tax dollars at work," says one, pointing at an empty lot. The mayor's name appears below, spelled wrong. Something about the handwriting, the letters themselves, is sarcastic. Their largeness tells of the artist's pleasure in releasing this idea; their crookedness of the artist's anger. The letters dip at the end of the sentence. This sprawl speaks to me. I see a dark humor at work, one that verges on despair.

Around me a people without access to paint or canvas battles to make meaning. Graffiti is a kind of weapon—sharp and two-edged. Raised, it draws down fire.

Other graffiti makes the leap from word into image. A pig's face with a permanent sneer is drawn on the side of a gourmet deli. A single line defines the mouth. The economy of graffiti, its deft quickness: a dancing body is captured by drawing only arms, three lines for a ribbed chest, and a flipped-up baseball cap.

I come across graffiti like a prospector who sees a flash in the brown dirt swirling in her pan. Each sighting is a surprise.

Following another of Striker's leads, I find a hand plucking up a crying eye. Three men sit in the parking lot where this image is painted on brick. I ask them if they know the artist or how to find him. They do not, but one of the men offers to interpret.

"The eye," he pronounces, "the eye is the eye of God."

His friend begins to talk simultaneously, telling me that I am lucky, for what I do not know. The last tells me to ignore the other two.

"The hand," the first continues, undeterred, "the hand is the hand of forgiveness."

"What's the arrow?" I ask. An arrow sweeps from beneath to point at the hand and eye.

The man shakes his head at my desire to read into the arrow. He rebukes me, "That's just showing what's happening."

"And that's a ghost," he adds, pointing at the wraith with the wings of a bat that dwarfs the crying eye.

Everywhere I meet people remaking life into art. People who approach the everyday differently.

I am shooting an image which consists of swatches of different colors of paint. A man sees me, asks what I'm doing, and begins to tell me how the image was made.

"See here? This was made by tossing the paint up, from a bucket, you know. And this by pouring it down. And this by throwing it from the side. No brushes. Just gravity."

"Are you the artist?"

He looks me up and down, gauging me. "Let's just say that I was here when it was made."

I begin to ask questions, but he grows anxious. "My friends are waiting," he says, starting up the stairs.

"Can we talk some other time?" I ask. "Do you live around here?"

"I sleep in the park. You'll see me around."

But I don't.

So much graffiti is tucked away, in corners, down low, hidden.



A family has been evicted from an apartment building, their things cast into the street. Tipped over, a jewelry box tinkles; the ballerina inside lurches in circles. Scribbled on the wall are the words "Hell Hole" with an arrow pointing down. Not far away: "Whats goin on" without the question mark. On a main thoroughfare: "Unite and Fight Back." In between avant-garde nightclubs for the elite: "Reclaim the neighborhood."

They see in graffiti a world of different values. A world where the human need to create is more important than property. Where people matter. The larger culture, the dominant culture, dislikes it. "Destruction of private property," they state flatly, hiring someone to paint it over. They see these images as acts of rebellion and how right they are. Each rises in the face of poverty and hostility. The individual against the mass. Unbroken. Which accounts, perhaps, for why graffiti that is name moves me most.

"Cool Coffee," says one, the o's made into friendly eyes, a bowler hat above. "Andre is a lover boy," declares another, high up on a wall, where someone had to stand on a garbage can to write it. Across the brick of an elementary school, the letters so precisely formed each is worthy of an exercise book: "Free Joey." Often the names are so personalized, so baroque with symbol that they cannot be deciphered.

To most minds, graffiti is only crude. Certainly, there are more sophisticated forms of art, more polished. But in graffiti I see my own aspirations more closely reflected than in a Picasso or a Faulkner. And I am encouraged to make my own leaps.

In 1984, a person drew women's shoes all over the city. Each drawing presented a side view of a woman's left shoe. Each shoe had a name and appeared with the artist's initials and a copyright date. "Cut.a.way style. XOXO J.TNWDC ©1984." "Leopardskin pump." "Black Evening pump." Most have now been destroyed. I found what I call Early Pump: Shoes with no name or date. I like to think that the artist worked with the idea in corners, perfecting it, before going public.

Obsession. Being obsessed — by an idea or an image — may be the only requirement for art. Obsession is what happens when you discover something odd about yourself and focus on it. I think of Van Gogh possessed by those twisting, swirling lines, no more able not to draw them than to stop breathing. Find your idiosyncrasy and push it. If you don't have a smooth voice, push the twang until it's its own thing. Do what you're most afraid of. Paint pumps.

The longer I work with the word art, the less I think art is defined by such words as beauty, skill, meaning, value, expression, communication, or even creativity. Such qualities are often present in art and are, perhaps, necessary to art. But they don't define art.

It was through my experience with graffiti that I began to question what art is. The definitions I had heard before seemed far too narrow to include what I had seen on the street. And I remained convinced that what I had seen was art.

So I worked for a while with an alternate definition: Art is anything done well. I liked this definition because it implied both process and product. Both the doing and the done had to be "well." In addition, the definition seemed to embrace what I had photographed, objects excluded by traditional definitions.

But I came to be dissatisfied with it. I was back to the public statue. The statue was done well, but it didn't fit. What the statue lacked, my definition lacked.

So I kept on photographing, hoping to shoot into an answer.

Street Art

In the local wig store, new wigs are announced weekly. Each appears with a sign that says "New Look" and some exotic name. This week it is "Dominique." A shoe store advertises itself by nailing forty shoes vertically inside a glass box. On Chuck's Bar, animals play instruments while money falls around them. The sign says, "The Spirit of Memphis. Crabs on Wednesday."

I stop a man on the street who allows me to take pictures of the interior of his van. The floor and ceiling are carpeted with blue shag rug. He has rigged up a fan, several lights go on at the flick of a switch, and there is a fringe along the windshield. His pride is palpable.

Newspaper has been crushed into balls and shoved into the diamonds of a chain link fence. Red spray paint adorns each. The balls spell out "Grand Opening" although nothing new has been built in this area for years. A paint brush sticks jauntily from one of the balled newspapers.

Everywhere, I see evidence of human creativity. For those who have eyes to see:

Street Sculpture

Early in the morning, I am out shooting houses. At Pastor Beatty's row house, there is a tiny vineyard. In the dark grotto beneath the vines are lawn chairs set up on flagstones and a beatific plastic Jesus. A block away, two ears of Indian corn hang serenely on the white siding that borders a cool green door. Nearby, a porch boasts a greeting painted next to the mail box: "A New Day." The porch columns cast shadows in the morning light.

Scrap-Metal Artist

It's the house near the one with Astroturf on the porch. Just up from the houses painted in tropical colors. A metal fence encloses its raised lawn, and walking by, I am suddenly aware of fantastical shapes appearing at eye level. Sculptures of frogs, fish, scorpions, and crabs intertwine with the fence poles. A large dragonfly and butterfly rise from opposite ends of the fence. An elephant made from screws and bolts appears next to a yellow golf ball.

A woman comes out of the house. Her son is leaving on a fishing trip with a friend, and she is straightening his shirt, telling him to be good and have fun. She has an accent. Her son, about ten, does not.

When her son leaves, I point to the animals and ask after the artist. "There are more inside," she tells me, leading me up the steps.

"Could I talk to the artist?" I ask.

She smiles to temper her words, "He died a year ago. My husband." She tells me later that many people stop to ask about the animals and the artist. And she, gracious, speaks to each.

Horacio Artiga, a Salvadoran who immigrated two decades ago, had been a construction worker for eight years. During his breaks he made animals out of the scraps of steel and wood laying around the site. Some of these sculptures appear in the fence in his front yard. Most appear inside his house along with his paintings and furniture. Some were exhibited in galleries before he died of a cerebral hemorrhage at forty-two.

Maria shows me his work, which fills the house, explaining how he came to make the animals and that he painted only scenes from El

Salvador. He never studied art in school, she tells me. He said he didn't need to, he had been born with a gift, a talent. He already knew how to do what he wanted to do.

"He was all the time creating. Art was his favorite." She waves at the bookshelves full of sculptures: "It's a zoo here."

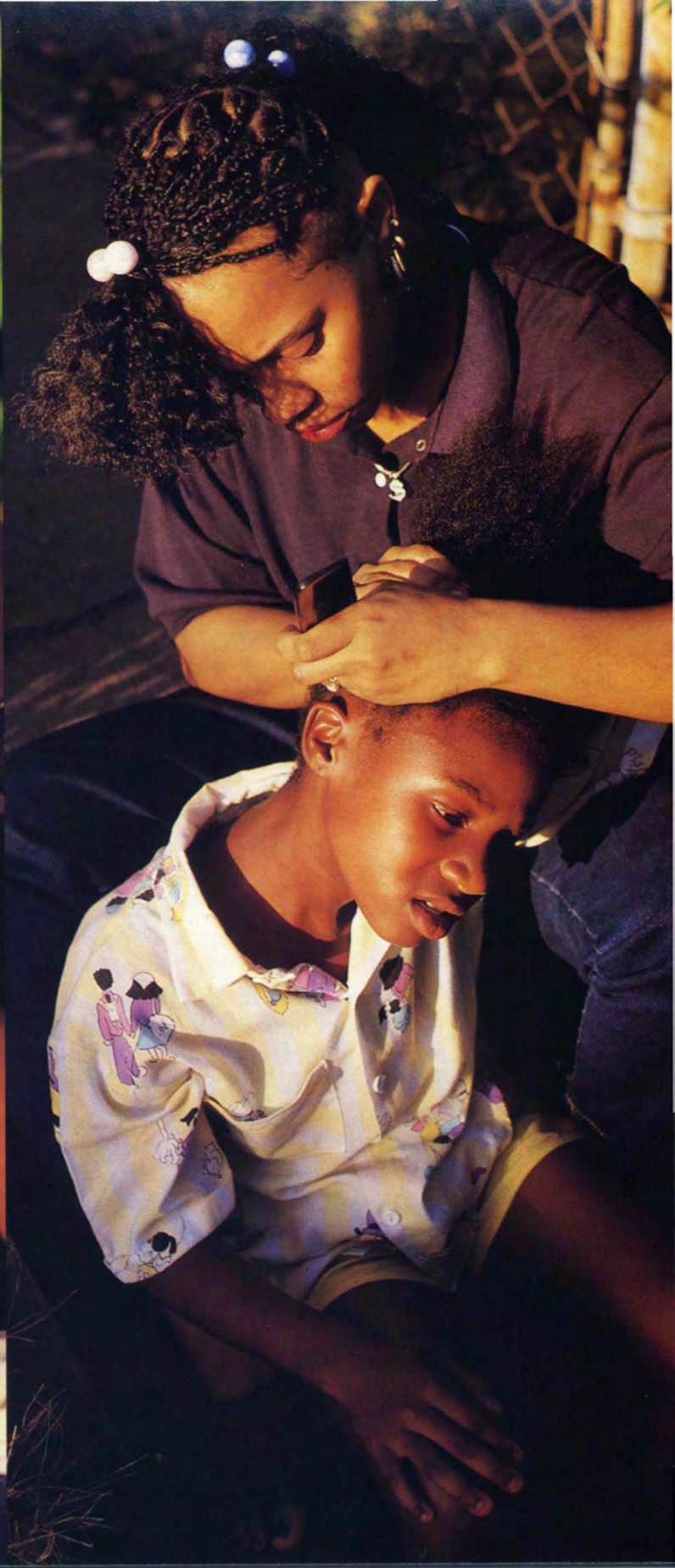
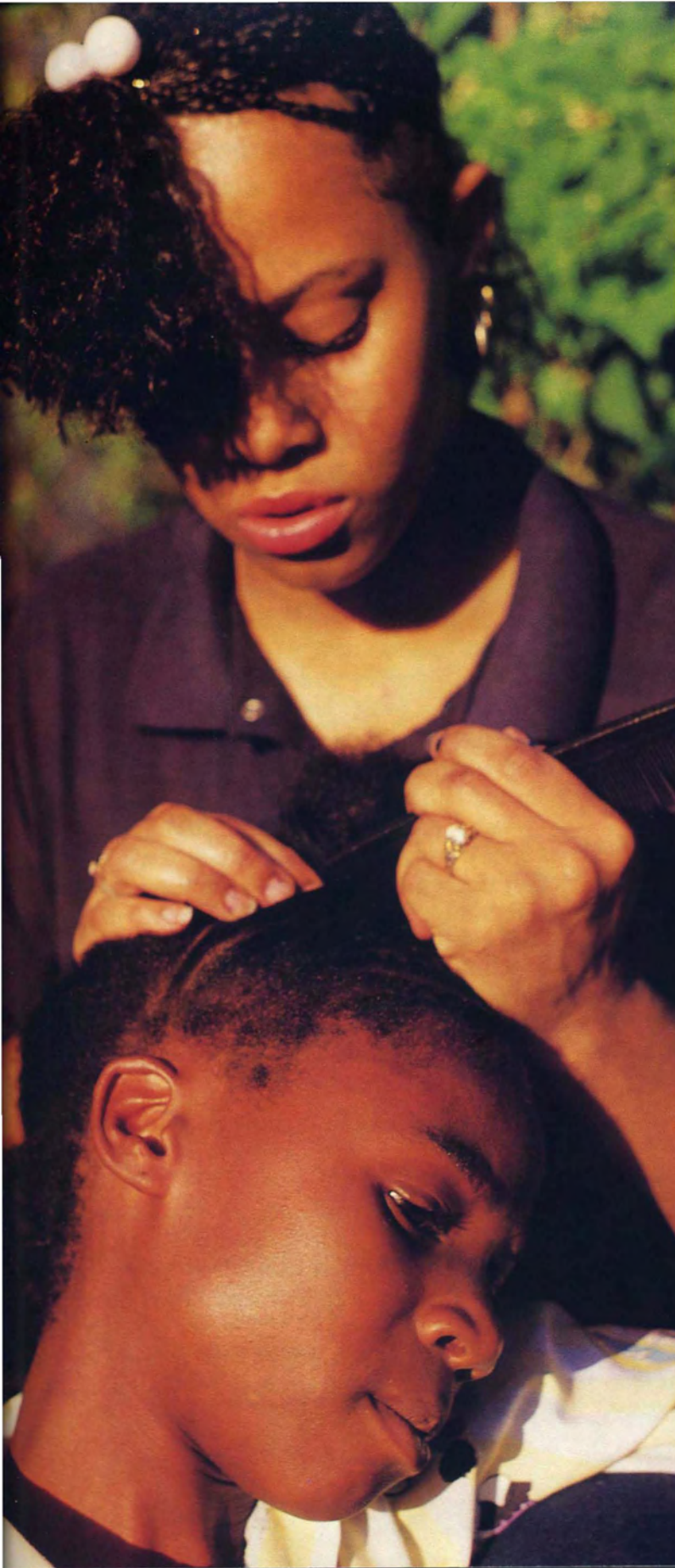
He favored animals from the zodiac, especially his sign, the scorpion, and hers, the fish. He also made hearts. "He was such a romantic," she scolds, her hand sweeping away a foolishness her smile embraces. At Halloween, he made a multitude of shapes out of pumpkins and each Christmas a whole nativity scene.

"He was very popular. Many knew him. He love to talk about his art." People offered to buy the sculptures, but he didn't like to sell them. He felt inspired when he created and feared he wouldn't be inspired if paid. "He never want to sell nothing," she declares. "He don't care how much you offer. He give it to you, but he don't sell it to you."

After telling me about his generosity, she remembers another story. "Once this lady came and like this little heart, it was so cute! and I said 'you can have it.' I didn't know that he had them counted! 'What!' he said. Oh, he was so mad at me. He asked me to get it back. 'It's not yours, it's not anybody's,' he said. He was collecting them for exhibition."

Maria picks up a metal lizard he had made. "Look at that." She runs a finger around the hollow bolt he had used for an eye. "I don't know how he think of such things," she muses, still puzzled.





Street Fashion

In the morning, I often see an older Ethiopian woman wearing a traditional costume of Ethiopia: hand-spun white cotton with embroidered borders, her hair braided in tiny rows. Traditional Japanese women with pale hands and sinuous kimonos are tattooed up both of a man's calves. A woman in a deep orange sari debates over breakfast cereal, a bangled wrist draped over her shopping cart handle. A man with dreadlocks which fall to his waist tells me he is allowing his hair its natural style.

Hair Weaver

Toni, who is twelve, lives next door to some friends of mine. On the steps of the row house where she lives, I ask her when she will have her hair braided next. Her braids are unraveling, so I expect it will be soon and hope to get some photographs.

"Tommorrow," she says, but when I return, she again says, "Tommorrow." I come then, too, but she tells me "Saturday." I stop by Friday, and the neighborhood women tell me that Friday is a good night for braiding hair.

After several fruitless excursions to find a woman braiding hair, Toni takes me to meet Kim Davis. As it happens, Kim has just washed her hair in preparation for braiding it herself.

Kim lives on the third floor of a row house with her sister Lisa, and Lisa's two sons. They live alone in a single room with a toilet and kitchen attached. Kim is fourteen, her sister not too many years older. Boxes of Pampers are stacked beneath an award certificate from school.

Their floor does not extend the length of the building, so outside the back window stretches the roof of the second floor. We slip onto the roof where Kim straddles a concrete wall dividing their building from the next, and props her mirror against the building. The day is beginning to cool, the light the warm red of evening. Her sister's sons play peekaboo in the window.

Kim unfolds her hair extensions and opens her jar of Blue Magic conditioner. She combs her hair, separates a square section from the rest, places two extensions against it, and starts to braid.

Her fingers are quick, contorting to twist the hair. She untangles the extensions with a sweep

of her hand at the end of each twist, working with rhythmic ease. The braids fall, glistening, over her face, each tight and smooth. Her scalp shows in geometric patterns between the braids.

I photograph the finished look—the braids tied in two ponytails, one in front, one in back. As I shoot, she tells me that many women ask to have their hair braided now. It's become more popular, even though it can take one or two hours to braid it "small" and four hours to do cornrows. She tells me about the different methods: braiding, plaiting, cornrowing, individuals, extensions. Kim has been braiding hair for seven years.

Later, Kim braids a young friend's hair. They sit on the steps of a house, Janelle's arm around Kim's thigh, her cheek on Kim's knee, her head encircled by Kim's arms. Janelle, so young, has flawless skin. Her cheek and jaw glow in the fading light.

As Kim braids, I ask her if she thinks it's an art, braiding hair.

"Yeah, I do."

"Why?"

"Well, most people don't know how to do it, most people don't even know how to plait. So I think it is."

I ask her how she came up with her hairstyle. "I first seen it in a shop. I did it on myself twice last week. But I do it different. See this?" She stops braiding long enough to point to how the braids fall over her left eye.

I nod. "Why'd you do it that way, different?"

"I don't know." A smile and a shrug. "I just like it."

Street Music

At the Hispanic festival, an impromptu band forms. A scheduled band fails to show and this one gets up to perform. Their instruments are mostly percussive: hollow wooden boxes and a podium banged with a stick. The two men singing are older, dapper gentlemen who pretend a rivalry with one another. As they sing, a couple from one of the floats begins to dance. His handkerchief and her skirt swing out. Their eyes are on each other, their feet fierce, their mouths laughing.

The next day the streets are deserted, eerily clean after the work of a night crew. A solitary figure wheels and beats a garbage can, ba da ba da bump, then saunters on.

Junkyard Band

Three boys sometimes ride their bikes over the bridge from Southeast Washington, retrieve their instruments from a boarded-up building, and set them up to play.

When I first see them, two police officers are telling them to move. They haven't a permit. So they transport their instruments in a shopping cart to the nearest subway exit, Dupont Circle. There, they again set up their instruments on top of stacked milk crates.

Their instruments include: four empty tomato-sauce tins—industrial size, four plastic buckets that once held construction mix, and a plastic garbage can. Some are set on top of the milk crates, some inside the crates; some are tilted, some rest on the ground. All are upside down. The drum sticks are bicycle grips shoved on broom handles, or wooden rulers.

My questions do not yield focused answers from Sean Ginyard, Marco Honesty Jr., and Clyde Moton Jr. They disagree on their group's name—either "Playboy Extension" or "White House." Clyde insists that his name is not Clyde, but will give no other. Although the drum sets are ready now, Clyde proceeds to fix his bike and then disappears for ten minutes.

Meanwhile, Marco tells me that this is the first time he has played with the other two. Usually Marco, who is older than the other two, plays with a "real band." He shows me how the various tins

and buckets reverberate with different sounds, pointing out that the bucket with a little cement in it sounds deeper. When Clyde returns, I ask them why they are playing. The youngest, Sean, gives me the clearest answer yet: "To make money."

After some jockeying, which occurs without discussion, they settle into position. They do not look at each other. Clyde hits his stick on the garbage can—thud—testing, and shifts on his bucket. He bangs his stick against the cement to loosen the bicycle grip and tries the garbage can again. He seems satisfied, for he nods, then launches in. After several beats, the other two follow.

I am surprised. Their anarchic approach and improvised instruments were no harbingers of their abilities. To my untutored ear, the rhythms are complex, overlapping sounds whose patterns infrequently repeat. After a time, Clyde halts. The others stop, listening, and Clyde plays something with large silent spaces which, following, they fill.

As I leave, someone throws coins in their collection bucket. The three, mouths pursed and intent, do not glance up.





Street Murals

Toulouse Lautrec with tossed scarf appears above a French cafe. A mural hung in a parking lot features maize, an atom held by a skeleton, and a military officer whose mouth spouts a pistol. Another mural—"painted by the community"—shows slaves inside a ship held by white-hooded figures with macabre grins. Near a bank, shards stab from a television set and a white one-eyed ghost looms. In the same mural, a black soul rises from a blown trumpet.

Painters of the Heart

Not much happens at the corner of Irving and 14th streets. The place is better known for its weeds. In the dusty lot that marks the intersection, men from a nearby shelter lounge on crates and dented lawn chairs.

I am surprised to come across a mural, one that was not up two weeks before. Especially one that is bright orange and yellow, splashing across the entire front wall of the La Morada shelter for the homeless. The surrounding buildings' paint peels in leaves.

Inside, I am told that thirteen teenagers and some men from the shelter joined together to improve the neighborhood by creating this mural. One of these men is Jack Manning.

I find Jack sitting in the lot. He has a cane, dimples, and a hat boasting several buttons, the most prominent being: "I'm a friend of the homeless."

Jack and I talk for a long time. "What a person got to learn is to respect himself," he tells me. When I nod, he reminds me that he doesn't need my assent. "I didn't get to be fifty-nine years old by being a fool," he says.

I glean only small facts about Jack's personal story. Jack has lived in the La Morada shelter since "the first snow" of this year. He had been a cook for 28 years when he developed arthritis. "Now I can't stand up on my legs thirty minutes in a row hardly. I don't want no charity, but I got to accept it, because I can't do no more." Before he was brought to the shelter, he had been living with a group of men on one of the bridges in the city.

Jack couldn't travel, so he guarded their few belongings in a lean-to they had constructed out of wood and paper, "the black paper you wrap flowers in." The other men brought him food. They called him "The Godfather" because he stayed "at home," and Jack called them "family."

I ask him what he thinks of the mural—which depicts interlocking hearts—and he brightens. "It's a beautiful thing. It's open to the public, and when they walk by, if they don't have love in their heart, it should create some love in their heart. That's what it's all about—love—no hatred, no angry. Everybody love each other."

A group gathers in the lot to talk every evening after work. One of the men from the neighborhood leans into the conversation. "You know what that painting is?" he says. "To me, it's just knowledge of the heart."

"Beautiful spoken," Jack interjects.

"If you care for someone, you'll believe in it."

Hearing this, another enters the conversation. He agrees that the mural is beautiful, but notes the talent in their own neighborhood that is going to waste. He describes people he knows who are skilled drawers or musicians, people who have "raw talent." Talent that needs to be developed but for which there is no money. "You'd be surprised what some people in this neighborhood can do." People working with only the materials at hand and producing beautiful things. "But in the urban areas they cut off the money from the children and then wonder why people so hard and so indifferent."

Meanwhile, outside the shelter, the teenagers

are preparing a farewell dinner of beans and rice. From environments as different as the second poorest county in the nation, El Salvador, and a northern art school, they are in Washington to learn about homelessness and Central America. The mural project is sponsored by a group called Partners for Global Justice. For two weeks the shelter residents and the teenagers worked together, ate together, shared together, and talked about the mural. While only the teenagers painted the mural, the shelter residents participated in creating the design.

Terrell Russell, the teenager who finalized the interlocking hearts design, says Jack especially influenced them. It was Jack's idea "to show two people meeting at the front door, two human beings accepting each other." Jack explains that this is what they do at the shelter: "We gets along good. We come to learn each other." Terrell adds that Jack also spent the two weeks encouraging the teenagers as they painted, "Jack really kept us going." Jack, sitting nearby, just smiles.

The teenagers seem surprised by how much they have gotten out of the experience. In the end, having come to do the mural for the shelter residents, they feel they have also done it for themselves. Assisted by a professional mural artist who donated her time, Antoninette La Grone, each of the teenagers had a chance to paint his or her own symbol inside one of the interlocked hearts.

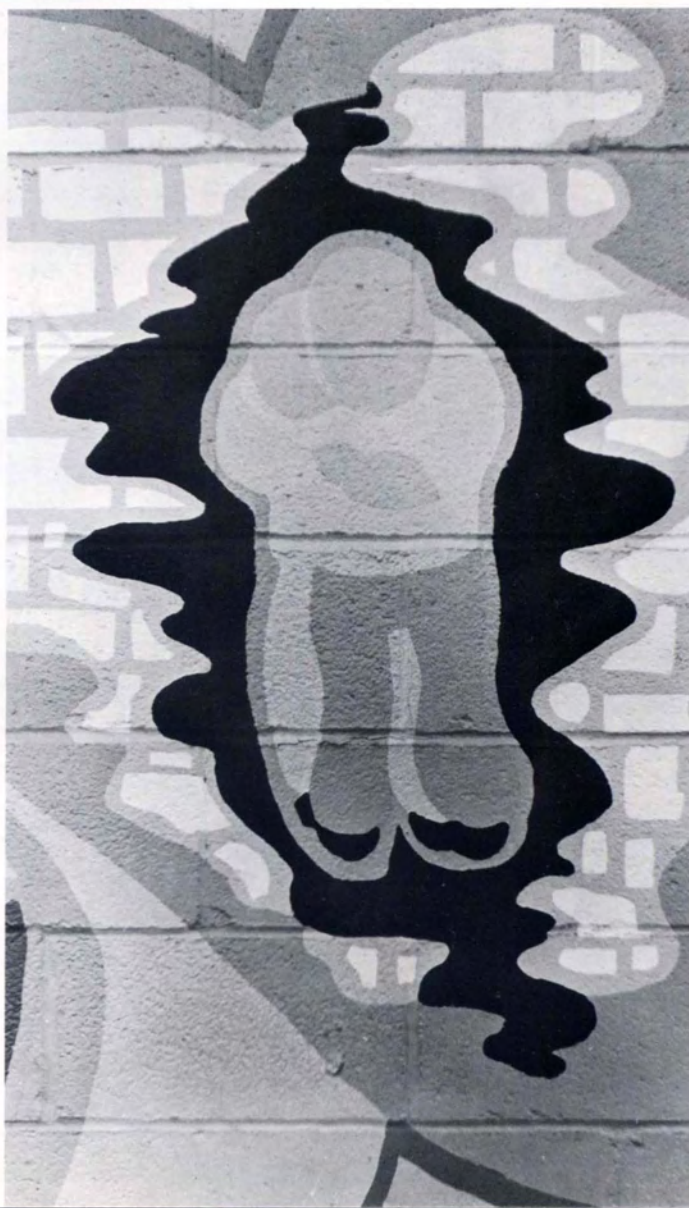
Arnett Lewis, III, explains his part of the mural. He places a palm on each symbol as he talks, "This has a black hand and a white hand shaking, and a cross, because we believe in Christ and we believe in unity." Clay La Grone describes his, "This is an angel holding the earth and to me it just shows how the world is loved and everything in the world is loved." Kelli Doyle points out, "This is a volcano and the rainbow goes into the volcano. The star shows that there's always going to be something there for us and the dove resembles love."

I take photographs, interview some other people, and then approach the shelter's gates, intending to leave. At the gates, two men sit. I squat down to talk to them, holding my tape recorder

up, and what I hear still rings in my ears.

"That mural expresses a lot of feelings that people share," says Jimmy Lawson, shelter resident. "You know, we're tearing the US apart—hate, wars, subterfuge, drugs—but we come together at this wall and it's a different place. It shows that we can do better. We're going to stop this. We're going to make it better so all of us can walk down the street and not be scared."

His companion, Thurman Freeman, is one of the shelter residents who got to know the teenagers well. He is impatient with my too obvious question about the mural. "What can people say?" he asks me. "That painting ain't nothing but love." He nods. "That's nice."



It may seem odd for me to end this issue writing about murals, a form that most everyone recognizes as art. But it is a sign of the reversals of the summer that I have come to think of murals as a form of graffiti. Their spirit is the same, their purpose is the same; the one is called art, the other trash. Through the lens, I see that such distinctions are artificial.

Seeing this led me to understand what my definition "Art is anything done well" lacked. Things can be done well and have no spark. It doesn't matter much what you call that spark—innovation, passion, care—but to me it means some evidence of the artist's spirit. Behind each object I was drawn to this summer, I could see a spirit.

From these thoughts bloomed a definition that I still like: Art is whatever rises. In some ways this is a simple idea. Art gets noticed. Art stands out. Art is the flower that breaks through concrete sidewalks. Despite its simplicity, I like this definition. It's fluid. An object might be art in one context and not another. At one time and not another. It suggests that art itself is fluid, evershifting.

It's not a perfect definition, but I keep it because, in the end, I did not care if my collection of words fit, or if anyone liked the way I came to define art. Neither seemed as important as what I learned to see this summer.

And what I saw was
damp and yeasty—
this place that ca
that holds a promis

something rising. Like dough
there is something about
n't be kept down, something
e to feed us all.

The Artists in this Issue:

Wendy Belcher is a Washington, DC writer and photographer. Her first book, *Honey from the Lion: An African Journey*, will be published in May by E.P. Dutton. It details her experiences in West Africa as a child and an adult. Next, she plans to write a book on urban West African popular art. Her interest in African popular art—particularly the slogans on vehicles, the toys children make, and the women's hairstyles—inspired her interest in the popular art of her Washington, DC neighborhood.

Wendy writes: "I would be interested in hearing any comments about this issue. Alternative definitions of art are welcome, as are reflections on times when you did what you were afraid of or when you pushed an idea that obsessed you. In particular, however, I would love to hear answers to the following question:

"It seems to me that being an artist is mostly a matter of seeing. And teaching others to see. Given that we all need to break out of rigid and prejudiced patterns, how can we learn to see anew? What do you do to make your world fresh?"

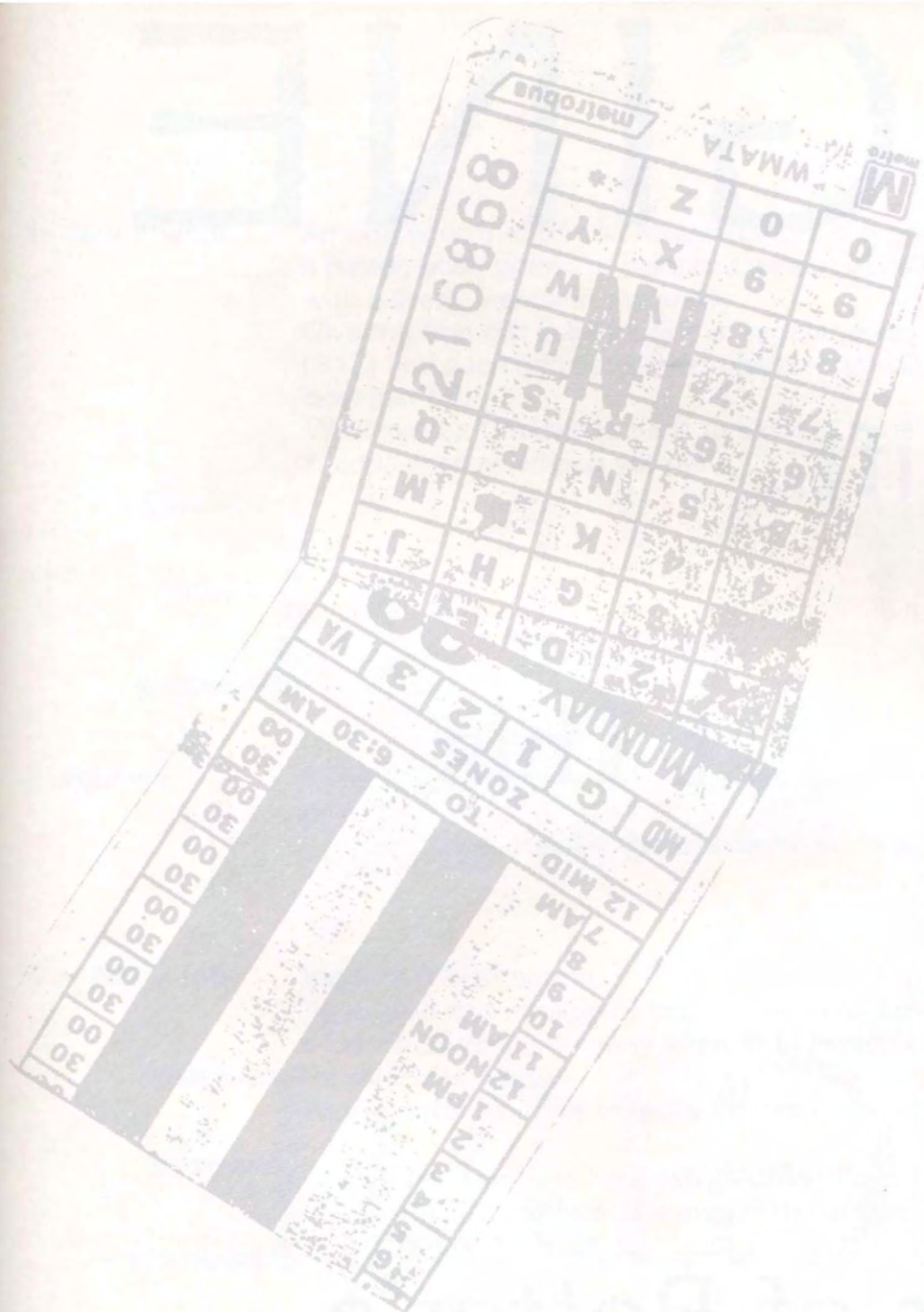
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Laurie Swindull is a senior in the design program at The American University in Washington, DC. She was one of three artists who co-designed Potter's House Press' issue, "The Wounded Quetzal: Women and Weaving in Guatemala."

In "Street Beat: The Art of the Street," Laurie worked to give readers the experience of being on the streets with Wendy. For example, to reflect the multi-textured quality of the street she chose three different typefaces which together create an impression of texture on the page. She says: "On the street you have to be alert. You never know when a line of graffiti, a sound, a whole painted wall will leap out at you as you come around any corner. I wanted readers to feel that surprise as they turned pages. But I also wanted to make them alert to the little things, because street art is often hidden." Laurie asks readers:

"Did you feel like you were walking down the streets with Wendy as you read this issue? When did you most feel it?"

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