

L.A.  
Art Seen

## Allan McCollum at the Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery

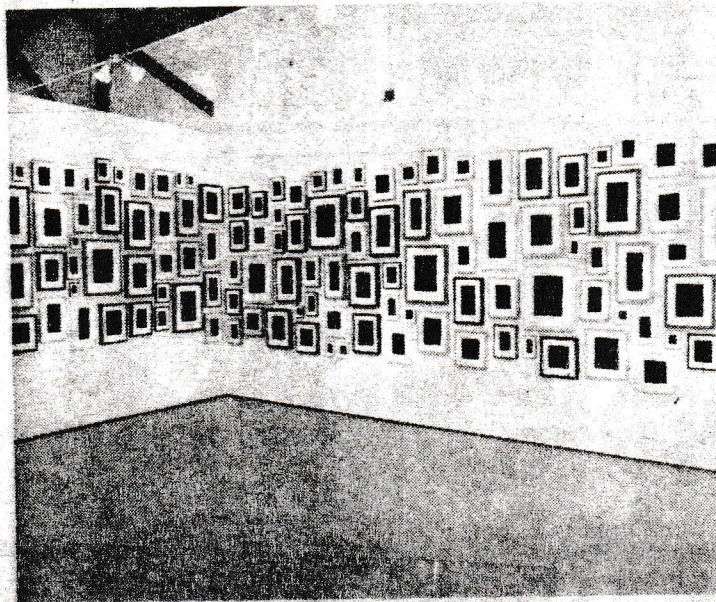
Four hundred paintings are hung salon-style around the four walls of the gallery. They range from four-by-five to sixteen-by-twenty inches. Every one of them is a black vertical rectangle with a white mat and a frame of black, gray or white painted on a plaster-like substance called hydrostone. Allan McCollum refers to these non-pictures as "surrogates," which act as stand-ins for paintings. His installation questions the possibility and potential for the unique work of art in this age of mechanical reproduction. The words are sold as mass-produced items, reasonably priced from \$100 to \$500, with discounts for group purchases.

The surrogates satisfy all the conventional conditions of original art, but the content exists only in the presentation. Just as earlier conceptualists such as Robert Barry once made the white cube of the gallery the subject of their art, McCollum examines the politics behind the exhibition process. Art is seen as

a mediator of social relations, and McCollum questions the value and meaning placed upon framed pieces of canvas "hanging in rich people's homes." While Rauschenberg, Reinhardt and Stella have all done black paintings, McCollum is representing anti-painting, with an attitude of high irony rather than high ideals.

In a back gallery hang black-and-white photographs, taken by the artist from newspapers or television, of famous personalities in tastefully decorated rooms. There are paintings on the walls, but they deteriorate to black shapes in the distance. (It looks as though the rooms have been decorated by McCollums for decades.) The surrogates, by extension, metaphorically distance the viewer from the expectations usually brought to fine art.

The number of surrogates in the show lends an air of exaggerated theatricality which is wholly appropriate to works that are calculated as "art props." One might wonder how many shows an artist can wring from such a premise, but McCollum's strategy already extends to another field. He is collaborating with Lousie Lawler on a series of pedestals designed to not support sculpture. (This is the inaugural exhibition of Kuhlenschmidt's new location at 9000 Melrose Ave. The show runs through Oct. 28.)



Allan McCollum's assemblage of surrogates.