

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY 812 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles 90069
Howard Singerman, "Jeffrey Vallance, Rosamund Felsen Gallery" (review), *Artforum*,
October 1981, p. 84-85.

Los Angeles

JEFFREY VALLANCE, Rosamund Felsen Gallery:

Jeffrey Vallance's first solo exhibition is above all entertaining. It buzzes and revolves and lights up. There are dials and switches, bugs and snails and paintings of and letters from famous people. The exhibition is also, depend-

ing on how you look at it, either pretentious or precocious. The artist is just 26, but half of the show is devoted to "early works;" the earliest dates from 1971, but one more recent work recycles an even older school art project.

Beyond its chronological division, the exhibition is divided by its title, "Machines and Articles," into two further categories. Though the works in both take their forms from the stereotypes of naive art, the categories have different models: the machines, which begin as small assemblages and grow into large motorized tableaux, owe to the folk artist; the articles, everything that isn't plugged in, seem the works of a child. But neither Vallance's child nor his folk artist is the kind of innocent who attracted the early moderns in their search for the pre- or extra-cultural. Rather they are the adolescent and the Venice Beach—or Greenwich Village—naïf, each in their own way aspiring to corruption.

The adolescent's identity is well-defined, consciously created by the artist in a series of works from 1976. In these, Vallance feigned adolescence, sending his old school art projects to national celebrities—a tempera-painted clay elephant to Strom Thurmond—with requests, handwritten on lined blue filler paper, that the recipient sign and return them. In the official typewritten replies that accompanied the autographed returns, Vallance was not, surprisingly, addressed as a school kid; Colonel Sanders and Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley went on to praise young Jeffrey's promise as an artist.

The recent articles are more consciously "art" works: paintings, draw-

ings, and collages that Vallance hung in a room "fired up" for the occasion. Its walls were plastered with decals and drawings and framed with a pencil-drawn border of bombs. Over the entrance, he enshrined a crudely drawn adolescent pantheon—the reptile, the amphibian, the rodent, the dog, and the roach. The stylized animals reappear in drawings on paper and paintings on board; in the drawings they are above Vallance's name and telephone number, besieged by jets, bombs, and schematized bomb blasts. Four fluorescent paintings of Los Angeles news anchor Connie Chung in a wartime landscape introduce a frightening and inflammatory view of the Orient. Vallance shares his postwar orientalism as well as his adolescent pose with a lot of "New Wave" art. The current vogue for Japan, however, is based not on the distance and differences from the West that attracted early modernism, but on its until-recently uncritical post-war adoption of the West.

In the machines, the "folk-artist" half of Vallance's show, the unweighed, irresponsible, and irrepressibly "neat" images of the adolescent become seemingly authentic and responsible concerns. Where the adolescent pose allowed Vallance to abdicate his responsibility to his images, the machines are endowed with a sincerity that makes it a good deal harder to split Vallance and the folk artist apart.

The two most recent machines, *C-82* and *Door of the Heart*, are built into large army-equipment-type lockers. *C-82* is outfitted with a fully operable military control panel and a large diorama flanked by two smaller ones. In the center one, the ruins of a thirties "house of the future" rest in a rocky landscape against an ominous and fully adjustable sky. In the right-hand diorama, a large lizard inhabits the same terrain; in the left, a relic from the house sits as sculpture beneath a painting of its source. The front of *Door of the Heart* is an almost lifesize "visible man" relief of the chest and abdomen. A small door in the heart opens to reveal three rotating tableaux. The first is the organ's interior. The second places a statuette of Jesus (with Sacred Heart emblazoned on his chest) in a blue-tiled and angel-ceilinged chapel. The third view is a domestic scene; in front of a small curtained window, a young couple embraces.

C-82 and *Door of the Heart* are the most mature of Vallance's works, the

least indebted to the naive Beat surrealism of the California box artists. They have been stripped of nostalgic funkiness, and of the found objects—the additive esthetic that characterized their forerunners. Their honed-down maturity is the flip side and, finally, the equal of the adolescent poseur's willful and conscious childishness. This theme of loss of innocence makes Vallance the subject of the show as well as its author.

—HOWARD SINGERMAN