

DAVID IRELAND'S *500 CAPP STREET*:  
MAKING VISIBLE A COMPLEX MATRIX OF RELATIONSHIPS

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
California College of the Arts  
In partial fulfillment of  
The requirements for  
The degree

Master Of Arts  
In  
Curatorial Practice

By

LAUREN R. O'CONNELL

San Francisco, California

May 2014

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## CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

We certify that this work meets the criteria for a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice at the California College of the Arts.

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KRISTINA LEE PODESVA  
Primary Thesis Advisor

---

DAVID GISSEN  
Thesis Mentor

---

LEIGH MARKOPOULOS  
Chair, Curatorial Practice

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LAUREN R. O'CONNELL  
California College of the Arts  
2014

From late 1975 until his death in 2009, the San Francisco-based artist David Ireland acted out a distinctive artistic philosophy that engaged common tasks and material in the everyday space of his home at *500 Capp Street*, a Victorian house on the corner of Capp and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets in San Francisco's Mission District. Known as a Bay Area sculptor and conceptual artist, and recognized for his experimentation with materials, Ireland's most overlooked medium was perhaps his house. Through several task-oriented actions and unconventional gestures, which I postulate as maintenance and preservation, Ireland engaged with the house in a distinct and sequential order. A study of the archive at *500 Capp Street* proves that the house was no idiosyncratic or peripheral activity, but rather a central one that offered a platform for an extensive system for his artistic concerns of process and performance, as well as their material evidence. This system serves as an index of Ireland's interaction with his house and is characterized by an ongoing symbiotic relationship between the architecture of a home and the events played out within it. The house, a stationary object, acts as the connective source for Ireland's work, a place where the artist experimented with everyday labor activities, which accentuated the effects of time on a building through preservation, and challenged the status of the autonomous art object, making visible a complex matrix of relationships.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my primary thesis advisor, Kristina Lee Podesva, for her continuous support, irresistible enthusiasm, and relentless query. Her advice and guidance has been invaluable.

Many thanks go to my thesis mentor, David Gissen, whose expertise on the complexities of preservation brought many valuable discussions forward. Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Leigh Markopoulos for providing me with key feedback that helped shape my critical position.

This project could not have happened without the support of 500 Capp Street Foundation, specifically Carlie Wilmans and Jessica Roux, who provided access to David Ireland's archive, images, and house, as well as their own impressions of the artist's work.

My deep appreciation goes to Tony Labat for generously sharing his artwork and memories of David Ireland and *500 Capp Street*.

Lastly, but not least, I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and patience of my partner, Jay, who stood by my side and stayed up many nights with me in deep thought and conversation.

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## INTRODUCTION

From late 1975 until his death in 2009, the San Francisco-based artist David Ireland acted out a distinctive artistic philosophy that engaged common tasks and material in the everyday space of his home at *500 Capp Street*, a Victorian house on the corner of Capp and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets in San Francisco's Mission District (see fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> After years of traveling, studying, and various professional experiences,<sup>2</sup> Ireland purchased the house, which was unique for having undergone little structural change since its construction in 1886 (see fig. 2), surviving fires on three sides as well as the 1906 earthquake. Through several task-oriented actions and unconventional gestures, which I postulate as maintenance and preservation, Ireland engaged with the house in a distinct and sequential order. First, the artist removed layers of wallpaper, paint, and baseboard from the walls in a performative act. Next, he deliberately preserved surfaces throughout the house such as walls, the floor, and the ceiling by sealing them with urethane. Through these interventions and others, Ireland conveyed that his relationship with his house related to his artistic practice and that, in fact, his artistic process—a technique of both high and low forms of labor such as housework, restoration, archeology, conservation, and so on—frequently explored the connection between *500 Capp Street* and himself. Thus, Ireland's interventions in his house constituted less an occasional home project

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland bought 500 Capp Street in late 1975 for \$50,000. See Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix B for a brief biography of David Ireland.

than the foundation of his artistic practice, which challenged the limits of medium and objecthood.

Known as a Bay Area sculptor and conceptual artist, and recognized for his experimentation with materials, Ireland's most overlooked medium was perhaps his house. While it is widely acknowledged as an important phenomenon in his life, it is often overshadowed by the attention given to the artist's sculptural objects, which had more exposure in national and international exhibitions due partly to their transportability (see fig. 3). As a consequence, the house has played a supplementary rather than essential role in accounts of the artist's practice, and Ireland's contribution to the history of site-specific and process-based art remains uncharted. A study of the archive at *500 Capp Street* proves that the house was no idiosyncratic or peripheral activity, but rather a central one that offered a platform for an extensive system for his artistic concerns of process and performance, as well as their material evidence. This system serves as an index of Ireland's interaction with his house and is characterized by an ongoing symbiotic relationship between the architecture of a home and the events played out within it. The house, a stationary object, acts as the connective source for Ireland's work, a place where the artist experimented with everyday labor activities, which accentuated the effects of time on a building through preservation, and challenged the status of the autonomous art object, making visible a complex matrix of relationships.

By identifying the house as central to his practice, acknowledging the tasks he undertook there as equal to the objects that resulted from these activities, and recognizing that the objects themselves were not independent of place and person, Ireland appears to have contributed a critical voice to the discussion regarding the coalescence of art and life, especially in relation to artistic labor. “[O]ne unifying principle of the extraordinary heterogeneous field of post-World War II avant-garde art was a concern with the problematic of artistic labor,”<sup>3</sup> argues curator Helen Molesworth in her book and exhibition *Work Ethic*. She goes on to explain that in the increased disregard for traditional artistic skills (drawing, painting, sculpting) the content of art was characterized by, “the language of *work* as opposed to that of art.... And in replacing the skills of art with the activities of work, artists began to make art that eschewed artifice and illusion and instead presented itself to the world as it was: ...an object insistent upon the labor of its maker.”<sup>4</sup> Through activities of maintenance and preservation within *500 Capp Street*, Ireland engaged his own variation of artistic labor to investigate art and life. Ireland believed that, “[a]rt lets us make observations of things that were always there,”<sup>5</sup> suggesting that familiar places, such a domestic environment, and everyday activities, such as cleaning, can become materials and performances of art.

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<sup>3</sup> Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Text written by Ireland on a poster advertising the first exhibition of *500 Capp Street* from February 3 to February 12, 1978 (11:00am to 4:00pm), with video by Tony Labat and photographs by Steven Kayfetz. Found in 500 Capp Street Foundation’s archive.

## MAINTENANCE

Ireland purchased *500 Capp Street* in late 1975 as a place where he could live and work simultaneously. The artist originally planned to tear down the interior walls to create an open space for his studio with a modern floor plan, fixtures, and infrastructure (see fig. 4),<sup>6</sup> but after spending time in the house he instead chose to clean it and highlight what was already there. “Maintenance Action” is the term Ireland used to categorize his work at *500 Capp Street*, about which he has said, “[I]t was not my intention to make an artwork out of the house. ...I’m just cleaning house. I [call] it a Maintenance Action. [I] sort of think of it as a performance, installation, kind of all of the different art forms....”<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting here that Ireland not only classifies his household tasks as part of the category of “Maintenance Action,” but he also identifies them as existing between different artistic mediums. Floating somewhere between restoration and conservation, these tasks ultimately transformed *500 Capp Street* to exceed the bounds of an artist’s live/work space and to operate as a unique and multifaceted artwork.

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<sup>6</sup> David Ireland: “So I found [*500 Capp Street* and] I said, ‘It’s perfect. I’ll tear all the walls out [to] have one big space. It’ll be kind of a studio space, and the other [areas] will be the living space.’ ...I moved in, and I started picking away at [the house], and I thought, ‘I can’t really tear these walls out. They’re too great.’ So I forgot about that idea of taking the walls out.” Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 25–26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

Among the tasks Ireland performed were removing wallpaper, paint, and baseboards; sanding the walls and ceiling; dusting; sweeping; vacuuming; stripping the floor; scrubbing with soap and water; and washing windows throughout the house (see fig. 5–20).<sup>8</sup> While these tasks took place in a domestic environment where labor is generally associated with housework and (in the 1970s) the female homemaker, Ireland’s labor aligns itself with the masculine role of the handyman, where laborious tasks are not repeated on a daily basis, but enacted in a shorter period with transformative end results. “Maintenance Actions” imply, however, at the level of language at least that the artist engaged in ongoing activities not entirely separate from the acts of housework, but how could such actions and common household work transform a house into art? And, what are the implications of this transformation?

The word maintenance and the act of cleaning echo the work and ideas of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who became known for cleaning performances such as *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* (1973), in which she cleaned the front steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum (see fig. 21).<sup>9</sup> According to critic and architectural historian Jorge

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<sup>8</sup> This list of actions was compiled by watching Tony Labat’s *David Ireland’s House* (1977), which will be discussed later. There also seems to be a correlation with Richard Serra’s *Verb List* (1967–68).

<sup>9</sup> “The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.” Her partition of development and maintenance proposes a power division of social classes, but more specifically of gender. The masculine takes on the role of development and the feminine of maintenance, which is obvious in places such as the home, but also in the art world and its institutions. At the time, the conceptual and process artists that were recognized by the institutions were primarily men, and therefore the two genres took on a masculine aura. Ukeles argues that, “Conceptual [and] Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.” This critical

Otero-Pailos, this work illustrates “the cultural stigma associated with cleaning,”<sup>10</sup> especially in relation to gendered social roles, maintenance workers, and, later in Ukeles’ career, waste management. In her formative essay, “Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!,” Ukeles defines maintenance alongside development as follows:

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.<sup>11</sup>

According to Ukeles’ formulation, the concepts of maintenance and development are not necessarily antithetical, but rather supportive—one needs the other. Ireland’s use of the word maintenance suggests a similarly reciprocal relation between the gestures of changing and sustaining, where the artist removes portions of the house (wallpaper, paint, dirt) to bring it to a state that he then chooses to preserve.

Ireland’s maintenance of *500 Capp Street* reflects his own evolution as an artist, as well as his art-making. For instance, he once recalled that he “[s]lowly progressed as

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observation suggests that the separation of masculine and feminine, development and maintenance is not a clear definition. See Ukeles, “Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!”

<sup>10</sup> Otero-Pailos, “Conservation Cleaning/Cleaning Conservation,” iv.

<sup>11</sup> Ukeles, “Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!”

an artist, and reached a philosophical point where [he] realized that the lively presence [he] was looking for...was here on the walls, as [he] stripped away and cleaned off the surfaces.”<sup>12</sup> Ireland’s artistic practice, specifically his actions within the house, was not purely self-reflexive or introspective. In other words, his activities were not independent from events happening around him, such as the real estate speculation and affordable housing crisis during the late 1970s in San Francisco.<sup>13</sup> In 1978, the same year that Ireland finished the majority of his “Maintenance Actions,” Optic Nerve and Charles Bolton made the documentary film *Pushed Out for Profit* about the rise in evictions and rental fees in the Mission District of San Francisco (see fig. 22 and 23). The documentary shows images of the Mission District in the 1970s, data on the ownership turnover rates and prices paid for apartment buildings, tenants and activists talking strategy, and the City Hall meetings of 1977 with Supervisor Harvey Milk.<sup>14</sup> This sociocultural phenomenon, which is often referred to as gentrification, was taking place all over the

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<sup>12</sup> Tsujimoto, *The Art of David Ireland*, 36–37.

<sup>13</sup> To state otherwise suggests a somewhat bourgeois conception of the individual house as the place to cultivate individuality, and, according to art historian Hal Foster, “any attempt to transform autonomy into a transhistorical, if not ontological precondition of aesthetic experience...is problematic.” German critic Peter Bürger in his 1974 book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, argues that the presumption that art is removed from social life—existing within its own system—renders the notion of autonomy as “socially ineffectual” and prompted the first “self-critique of art” by Duchamp. Taking a stand as provocateur of the bourgeois notion of cultural production, Duchamp wrote in 1913: “Can one make works that are not ‘works’ of art?” See Foster, *Art Since 1900*, 23, 24, 126.

<sup>14</sup> See *Mission Local* “Clip 1: Introduction – Housing Crisis 1978,” “Clip 2: Housing Crisis 1978,” “Clip 3: Shotwell in 1978 and Today,” “Clip 4: Housing Crisis 1978: Uprooted,” “Clip 5: The Three Sides of Harvey Milk,” “Clip 6: Inside City Hall 1977,” “Clip 7: Rent Control 30 Year’s Later.”

United States during the late 1970s and greatly affected artists who struggled to find studio space.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps Ireland's declaration of his "Maintenance Action" was a position of defiance towards the negative effects of development on the Mission District community during this period. However, Ireland's intervention seems to be a rather different type of gesture than that of activism, taking on instead a provocative attitude by subverting the use and context of a common object for art and thereby removing the object as an active participant in the events surrounding it. Ireland's artistic activities of maintenance and preservation not only render the house unavailable for redevelopment in some respects, but it also represents fixity in the face of the changes wrought by processes of gentrification. According to Molesworth, the critic and historian Leo Steinberg in his essay "Other Criteria" (1968), "stated plainly that new art presents itself not as 'art' but as 'work,' and as such needs to be analyzed in sociocultural terms in addition to those taken from the discourse of art."<sup>16</sup> In this instance, Ireland's art is his work, which engages the house as a platform for his performance of maintenance and preservation, as well as the observation of urgent social and economic conditions of San Francisco.

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<sup>15</sup> For more about art and gentrification, see Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 29.

Shortly after purchasing *500 Capp Street*, Ireland repaired the sidewalk in front of the house at the city's request. Artist and friend Tom Marioni videotaped Ireland as he went about pouring the concrete and smoothing it with a trowel—a precursor to the orchestrated “Maintenance Actions” that Ireland conceptualized (see fig. 24).<sup>17</sup> It is clear that the artist intentionally documented his maintenance and preservation actions because he subsequently invited Steven Kayfetz to photograph them and artist Tony Labat to videotape his time-intensive tasks, which took place over an entire year.<sup>18</sup> In conversations with Labat, Ireland would establish his tasks before executing them in front of the camera (see fig. 25 and 26). The simultaneous results of this collaboration were the documentation of Ireland's performance and the creation of a video work by Labat entitled *David Ireland's House* (1977, 19:28 minutes).<sup>19</sup> Remaining black and white video footage shows Ireland in the process of removing wallpaper from walls and molding from windows, scrubbing dirt off the walls, sweeping dust, and stripping hardwood floors. Labat zooms in very close at times to the point of abstraction, and other times captures a clear image of Ireland in the rooms of *500 Capp Street*. Labat and Ireland did not talk to each other in the video, but there is a cacophony of repetitive noises (scrapping, sanding, and scrubbing) from the work that Ireland was acting out.

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<sup>17</sup> Tsujimoto, *The Art of David Ireland*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> At this time, Labat was an MFA student at the San Francisco Art Institute. Ireland said, “I knew in the beginning that I wanted a tape of the different actions.... [T]he stripping of the wallpaper, and the scrubbing, and taking the trim off, and digging dirt out of the basement. Tony [Labat] caught all of these different moves.” Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> See interview with Labat, Appendix A.

Ireland preferred to use the term “action,” as he felt that the word performance implied theatricality—an act of exaggerated or excessively dramatic situations. He said: “The word ‘action’ somehow implies that there was some movement, but there wasn’t an attempt to be theatrical.”<sup>20</sup> While the artist did not associate his “Maintenance Actions” with theatricality, the jobs he assigned himself and then carried out in the manner of any other ordinary task being done were still a form of performance art. Returning to *Work Ethic*, Molesworth notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, “artists were replicating the roles of both manager and worker in the production of art,” and that “[a]rtists who assigned themselves tasks and then performed them rejected traditional artistic media and their attendant skills and turned instead to a presentation of the work of art in the language of “a thing done,” a task performed.... In doing so, many developed an obsessive reliance upon documentation.”<sup>21</sup> In view of Molesworth’s findings, it is logical to think of Ireland’s “Maintenance Actions” as performances involving basic labor.

Performance, as art historian Kristine Stiles defines it, is “unlike conventional art, [in that it] asserts embodiment and interconnection in time, space, and place as the basis of human experience, perception, and representation.”<sup>22</sup> The temporal and locational specificity of a performance, as well as its reception by an audience—who inadvertently become participants through their presence—, are integral to this experience-based art

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<sup>20</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Stiles, “Performance,” 75.

form. Artists often use or make objects during a performance, but Stiles explains that the performances of twentieth century artists “illustrate how the artifact is only an index of art; ...not—necessarily—art itself.”<sup>23</sup> Stiles continues: “In performance, artists present and represent themselves in the process of *being and doing*, and these acts take place in a cultural context for a public to witness.”<sup>24</sup> If Ireland’s activities were performances, they occurred in the private space of a house, prompting the question who were they for? Or in other words, who is their audience?<sup>25</sup>

Ireland intended his performances to exist for an audience through video and photographic documentation of his task and process-based work and by opening the house for exhibition—the first time in 1978 after he completed his maintenance and preservation interventions (see fig. 27 and 28).<sup>26</sup> But, it is worth noting that by presenting the actions to the audience second hand, through the mediation of documentation and the house as evidence, an aspect of performance is challenged: that is the importance of the live, in-person event, which is advanced by performance scholar RoseLee Goldberg.<sup>27</sup> In the case of Ireland’s performance, a person (i.e., the artist) creates an experience vis-à-vis

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<sup>23</sup> Stiles, “Performance,” 95.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> This same question is brought up in relation to the artist performing in his/her studio, such as Bruce Nauman’s four studio films (1967–68). In the case of private performance, documentation becomes a vital source for presenting the artwork.

<sup>26</sup> The first exhibition of *500 Capp Street* was from February 3 to February 12, 1978 (11:00am to 4:00pm), with video by Tony Labat and photographs by Steven Kayfetz. Information from an exhibition poster found in 500 Capp Street Foundation’s archive.

<sup>27</sup> RoseLee Goldberg is a pivotal figure in the early identification of performance art. RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1979).

the house either alone or in front of a camera. Here, the performance can perhaps be defined as a *lived* event—the implementation of commonplace and laborious tasks, resulting in a lived experience that resonates beyond the moment of execution.

## PRESERVATION

Following the extensive cleaning that Ireland performed throughout the house; he coated the majority of its exposed surfaces with several layers of urethane.<sup>28</sup> At *500 Capp Street*, the thick film of sealant has left a shiny translucent yellow finish on the walls, which appears to seal the cracks, water damage, and blemishes there without hiding them. The remaining baseboards, doorjambs, and window casings are a light sea-foam green under a coat of the same urethane. Here, Ireland's intervention is a gesture towards preserving the evidence of lived moments, both his own and those of past residents. Just as archeologists use the term site for the location of an excavation, we might also apply this sense of site to *500 Capp Street*, a place where Ireland unearthed the physical vestiges of the house to create a sort of social archeology, a study of human presence within a social space. Ireland describes this process as "a kind of a stabilization, a kind of holding it and freezing it in place,"<sup>29</sup> or in other words, the preservation of his findings.

Ireland's symbolic gesture of freezing the surfaces at *500 Capp Street* did not follow guidelines of professional conservation, yet the results seem to parallel 19<sup>th</sup> century theorist and critic John Ruskin's theories of preservation. Ruskin argued that preservation should not adopt the pretense of restoring the original, but reveal the effects

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<sup>28</sup> In a 2003 interview, Ireland stated that, "[he] would have not varnished the walls, [but he] would have let them be that kind of chalky whiteness," of the rooms that were not coated in urethane.

<sup>29</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 26.

of time on the building to better understand its history.<sup>30</sup> Rather than covering the old with the new in order to restore it to its “original” state, Ireland’s process exposes the marks of time—both natural and manmade. The preservation of buildings has long been part of the debate between construction and destruction—each holding their own merits of supporting a city. Otero-Pailos claims that, “the term [preservation] is invoked as if it has an essential, self-evident, and constant meaning that is the opposite of change.”<sup>31</sup> However, change cannot be avoided, as it is part of the natural and manmade effects of time, and so in preservation’s attempt to isolate a specific moment it then becomes itself a factor of change reflected within the built environment.

Along with maintaining and preserving the original surfaces and architectural details of *500 Capp Street*, Ireland also made obvious his own modifications to the structure, such as patching up a wall, because he did not want to make the new look like the old or vice versa. For example, Ireland transported a heavy safe down the stairs (left behind by the previous owner Mr. Greub) and damaged the walls in doing so, leaving two dents behind—one on the stairway landing and another in the front hallway. Instead of repairing the damage, the artist chose to acknowledge the event with two plaques reading: “THE SAFE GETS AWAY FOR THE FIRST TIME NOVEMBER 5, 1975” and “THE

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<sup>30</sup> Ruskin writes, “There was yet in the old *some* life, some mysterious suggestion of what it had been, and of what it had lost; some sweetness in the gentle lines which rain and sun had wrought.” Ruskin, “The Lamp of Memory,” 135.

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Otero-Pailos, “Remembrance of Things to Come,” in *Artforum* (April 2014), 115.

SAFE GETS AWAY FOR THE SECOND TIME NOVEMBER 5, 1975” (see fig. 29 and 30).

By keeping as much of the original architecture as possible, Ireland attempted to make visible traces left behind by past tenants. These traces often go unnoticed due to their slight presence and sometimes altogether physical absence. Never-the-less, traces are evidence of life as defined by contemporary artist Gabriel Orozco: “People do leave traces in their wake: the refuse and detritus of history; the variegated remnants of daily life; or dust. A trace is ephemeral, a locus of ambivalence suspended in the unstable space between construction and dispersal, presence and absence. A trace is very little, almost nothing. But it is also an index of life.”<sup>32</sup> One can find indexical traces of existence on the interior surfaces in *500 Capp Street* encapsulated under urethane, commemorated by plaques, and so on. It is with this notion of leaving traces that the spaces there have a lively, but also ghostly presence, simultaneously stuck in time, and enduring in the present.

In some respects, Ireland’s actions at *500 Capp Street* resemble those of mummification or the preparation of ancient tombs, where the space (body or grave) is purified and then preserved for the journey to the afterlife. In his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, theorist Anthony Vidler discusses the role of architecture in the notion of the

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<sup>32</sup> R.D. Homboe, *Gabriel Orozco: Cosmic Matter and Other Leftovers*, 2011, n.p.

*heimlich* (homely) and *unheimlich* (unhomely) presented by Freud in relation to the uncanny. According to Vidler, the twentieth-century psychologist Ernst Jentsch "attributed the feeling of uncanniness to a fundamental insecurity brought about by a 'lack of orientation,' a sense of something new, foreign, and hostile invading an old, familiar, customary world."<sup>33</sup> Ireland's relationship to, and process within, *500 Capp Street* suggest that the house is more than a static building, but rather a living organism—its structure as bones, walls as skin, and so on—thus disturbing the convention of a home, and inverting one's orientation.<sup>34</sup>

In several images taken of the house's second level shortly after the completion of Ireland's preservation work, the rooms glow (see fig. 31–33). Ireland particularly admired the luster of these surfaces when he said: "One of the wonderful things about the [second level rooms] is that [they] reflect what is going on outside. A car goes by and it gives a big red streak on the wall, and a blue one goes by and I get a blue streak."<sup>35</sup> Even today, over thirty years later, the walls, ceiling, and floor on the second level reflect light that enters through the tall windows, bouncing with each movement on the street or in the sky: cars driving by, fog and clouds moving over and around the sun, and other overlooked movements. There is a chill in the air and sounds from the street fill the rooms—as if there were nothing separating the two—due to the original single glass

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<sup>33</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Curator Karen Tsujimoto describes *500 Capp Street* as, "A metaphor for the house, it lays bare its bones and sinew and literally turns one's viewpoint upside down." Tsujimoto, *The Art of David Ireland*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 26.

windowpanes and 1886 insulation. The glass, fractured in places, rattles from the vibrations of passing cars. Each sensorial experience positions the interior private space of the house in conversation with the public spaces that lie just outside its walls.

While many of these traits may be common in older homes, especially San Francisco Victorians, there is an intention by Ireland to preserve the original windows and walls at *500 Capp Street*, and maybe less an intention to use those windows and walls to create an experience of light and movement reflecting the city's activity. "Preservation offers a critical historical view of an object in space and time," explains Patrick Ciccone, a specialist in historic preservation. "[B]ut, paradoxically, only by full recognition of the absences in both physical and temporal records.... Time here does not necessarily mean the linear phenomenon we experience, but rather the incomplete record of time deposited in the built environment."<sup>36</sup> Suggesting that preservation cannot recount every event of an object's life, but instead observes the marks of lived events on a building to achieve some glimpse of what has endured. And yet, are Ireland's preservation actions at *500 Capp Street* only evident on the surfaces in the house, or can the actions themselves be preserved? Perhaps it is a combination of the two, creating a perpetual state of activity involving more than preservation of the object alone, but also of the dynamic and time-based process involved in doing so.

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<sup>36</sup> Ciccone, "Space, Time, and Preservation," ix–xi.

## ACTION SCULPTURE

A considerable amount of Ireland's artwork is categorized as sculpture, which in its traditional form is a stand-alone, three-dimensional object, but the artist's definition of sculpture was not static. Ireland said, "Whatever I'm doing is sculpture, is action sculpture."<sup>37</sup> In the case of Ireland's practice, sculptural objects take on the fourth dimension in relation to the time-based tasks and processes that formed them. The artist also considered the activities of maintenance and preservation as forms of "Action Sculpture," as the performative gestures often left evidence through material objects, such as documentation, sculptural objects, and the house.<sup>38</sup> Ireland's concentration on the actions by which an object was found or formed emphasizes, in the words of Molesworth, "how it was made rather than the final product."<sup>39</sup> The sculpture-like objects are, for the most part, made of basic materials that together combine to become valuable and symbolic of the activities of the artist in his house.

Portions of the house, either physically or conceptually, permeate each sculptural object Ireland made, and their materials seem to fall into one of three categories: those exhumed from the house, those brought into it from other places, and those that the artist

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<sup>37</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 39.

<sup>38</sup> See interview with Labat, Appendix A.

<sup>39</sup> "Often referred to as Process art, this shift in emphasis was offered as a critique of the commodity status of art and was bound up with artists' desire to retain a degree of autonomy for the artistic act—a last-stand protection of sorts against an increasingly commodified world." Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 42.

made through experimentation with process. In the first group, for example, are a jar of rubber bands (*Rubber Band Collection with Sound Accompaniment*, 1977), a collection of used brooms (*Broom Collection with Boom*, 1978), several broken chairs (*Three-Legged Chair*, 1978), dried patties made from used wallpaper (*Untitled (wallpaper patties)*, 1978), and a copper-filled window with an audio recording of Ireland describing the former view (*Untitled (copper window)*, 1978) (see fig. 34–38).<sup>40</sup> The components of the second group come from Ireland’s personal history in the form of family heirlooms (a cabinet inherited from his grandparents), souvenirs and relics collected during his time as an African safari guide (animal skulls, horns, and a stool made of an elephant foot), or furniture he designed specifically for the house (see fig. 39–41).

The most famous of Ireland’s process-based sculptures is *Dumbballs* (1986), made from the repetition of throwing concrete from one hand to the other until it dries into a uniform spherical shape. These sculptural objects act as evidence of the artist’s performance, which took place inside *500 Capp Street*. The artist’s hand is literally represented in the finger marks imprinted in the concrete and the hand-sized shape of the balls.<sup>41</sup> In the introduction to the exhibition *Skulpturales Handeln [Sculptural Acts]*,<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> According to Ireland, most of this material came from the hoarded waste left behind by the former owner, Mr. Greub. Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> In a discussion about *Dumbballs*, David Ireland said, “I could be mistaken, and it hardly matters at this point, but I think the wallpaper came first, and it was just taking it off the walls, getting that kind of thing. Then I thought, ‘You know, there’s a process that makes it,’ and I was starting to get some feeling for process. And the perfection of the process is how well it comes out in my mind. I’m saying, ‘Okay, I want to make something. Wallpaper has its limitations. I want to do something that will be permanent...’ what we talked about before, the size will be determined by the size of the hand of the person who makes it. It’s

curators Patrizia Dander and Julienne Lorz write: “While sculpture is ordinarily associated with a state of stasis, the act suggests movement or an action of some sort. The premise here is that the acts involved in making sculpture; processes that are not usually presented or visible to the viewer, but which are, nevertheless, inscribed in the way materials are used.”<sup>43</sup> In this way, Ireland’s action of throwing the *Dumbballs* is equal, if not more significant, to the residual object.

The *Dumbballs*’ spherical shape materialized as Ireland tossed the concrete from one gloved hand to the other, over and over, for a period of time (see fig. 42). One can visualize the motion of the ball moving back and forth, marking a moment with each catch of Ireland’s hand, which holds the ball and puts it into action. Keeping this motion in mind, imagine the ball as the house and Ireland’s hands as his tasks. With each gesture by the artist, the house is transformed into a system of activities and relationships. Each step taking place over long periods of time that one cannot witness in the same immediacy as the *Dumbballs*, which occurs at a different rate. Ireland’s artwork—sculptural or performative—are a series of actions that rotated around the axis of his house—a repository for provisional materials and a site of artistic production and presentation.

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a universal material. [Concrete is] available all over the world, yet it somehow is particular to the individual.” Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> The exhibition *Skulpturales Handeln [Sculptural Acts]* was on view at Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany, from November 11, 2011 to February 26, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Dander and Lorz, “Sculptural Acts,” 16.

The architecture of a building is another factor in activating space, where the fixed and static structure becomes material for an architect or artist to engage the diurnal components of a place. The materials of a building, such as walls, windows, and door handles, weather over time through exposure to natural elements or everyday use by its occupants. The placement of doorways, hallways, windows, and so on, allow the conditions of a site—light, wind, temperature—to affect how one moves through the space. The immediacy in which this occurs is not obviously apparent and requires dedicated observation. The activity of maintenance and preservation that Ireland performed in the house drew attention to these overlooked moments that are captured in the architecture of *500 Capp Street*, and changed the way one responds to the conditions of a site. Art historian Miwon Kwon defines the art-site relationship as, “[the incorporation of] the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art,”<sup>44</sup> suggesting that art gathers context from its connection to the site where it was made and presented. In this definition of the art-site relationship, where is the artist? Ireland’s process at *500 Capp Street* demonstrates the integral role of the artist in the relationship between site and artwork, thus expanding the definition to make a trifold connection between artist, site, and work.

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<sup>44</sup> Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 1.

One of the ways that Ireland made this multifaceted relationship visible was through the simple gesture of arrangement. Changing the display of objects within the house was, to the artist, a way of “acknowledging space and what occurs inside of space,”<sup>45</sup> as well as enacting his artistic agency. In a series of images of a room or a wall taken during different periods of time, one can see that the objects do not stay in one place inside the house (see fig. 43 and 44). At times, the main rooms on the second level appear minimally inhabited by people or objects, while at other times objects clutter the space. Moving furniture, sculptures, and wall hangings within the house became another one of Ireland’s performative processes, creating a place where time is simultaneously frozen in the walls, floor, and ceiling, and playing out within the space of the rooms. These actions further suggest the artist’s control over of the objects within the site by placing both in a state of flux.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 38.

<sup>46</sup> In an interview, David Ireland said, “I have work that comes back from exhibitions or something, and I start working on it some more. Someone could say, “Hey, you just showed that work, and you didn’t have it in this arrangement.’ I said, ‘Well, it’s mine to do what I choose.’” Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 40.

## CONCLUSION

Today one might recognize Ireland's labors through the relics he left behind—including documentation of his "Maintenance Actions," the preserved walls of the house, an abundant archive, and sculptural objects that, through their display, continue to disperse a web of relationships in order to make new ones. Even after his death, writer Sasha Wizansky claims that, "[500 Capp Street] is *lively* with evidence of [Ireland's] ability to discover new details, new avenues of investigation, in the most quotidian objects and materials."<sup>47</sup> The system of process and performance that Ireland engaged in the house brought attention to the temporal and ephemeral qualities of a building, especially in relation to traces of social activities. The proposition that the house is lively in Ireland's absence raises a series of questions: Do the relics of Ireland's work, such as documentation and sculptural-objects, and the house provide enough residual proof to communicate their relationship to the artist's practice and actions? What preserves the relationship between Ireland's artistic labor and its material evidence?

The notion of preservation takes another role in the posthumous representation and display of Ireland's *500 Capp Street*. The discussion of the perpetuation of an artist's studio after his/her death has been examined in relation to Romanian-born French sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) and Irish-born British figurative painter

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<sup>47</sup> Wizansky, "Metaphorical Bones."

Francis Bacon (1909–1992). In both cases, the artists’ studios were moved and reconstructed at a museum for display, amplifying the myth of the artist. However, Brancusi left his studio to the state of France with instructions for display, while Bacon requested that his studio and contents be destroyed upon his death. Brancusi’s studio was designed and reconstructed by architect Renzo Piano outside the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1997. In his essay “Brancusi’s ‘white studio,’” art historian and curator Jon Wood discusses Brancusi’s original studio and how its “whiteness” was carried over into the reconstruction (see fig. 45). Wood argues that, “[t]he white studio was a highly successful conceit: it was not only a crucial means of providing Brancusi’s sculpture and his own sculptorhood with harmony and autonomy, but also an effective device through which reception could be housed and enhanced.”<sup>48</sup> The “whiteness” of Brancusi’s studio conceptually represents the artist’s beliefs about art, but also carries a sense of place within its abstraction. Brancusi’s process seems to transmit through the whiteness of the walls and material of his sculptures—plaster and stone—despite being removed from its original location.

Bacon’s small, cramped, and cluttered studio at 7 Reece Mews in London, where the artist worked for over thirty years, was moved to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Ireland, and resurrected within the museum’s gallery (see fig. 46). The artist’s studio is presented as a *mise-en-scène* and accessible for viewing through the room’s doorway,

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<sup>48</sup> Wood, “Brancusi’s ‘white studio,’” 281.

windows, and an additional pair of peep holes in a wall. Art historian David J. Getsy points out that amongst the clutter of this replica there are two key elements missing: the artist and artworks. Getsy explains that, “[t]he initial shock of the chaos of the studio fades, however, as one begins to recognize how its contents have been subtly arranged.... Despite its overwhelming mess and disarray, the space is carefully orchestrated artifice—one designed to convince us that we are seeing into the inner workings of Bacon’s workplace and, by extension, his creative process.”<sup>49</sup> He continues, “the problem [is the attempt] to freeze one final moment in the history of an ever-changing environment.”<sup>50</sup> In this case, museum curators attempted to restage Bacon’s place of artistic production, but can only do so based on historical images, especially since the artist did not leave instructions for display because he requested that the studio and its contents be eliminated. Without the artist working in the studio, the space becomes a somewhat superficial and momentary glimpse of what might have occurred within its walls.

The studio was a place for Brancusi and Bacon to make their sculptures and paintings. For artists, such as Ireland, who eschewed medium-specific work, the studio did not necessarily function as a place to make an object that would then leave its site of origin to be presented elsewhere. No longer a blank space for production, the physical space itself became part of the art through the artist’s activities. About the art studio, Molesworth writes: “It follows that in the absence of traditional artistic skills and

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<sup>49</sup> Getsy, “The Reconstruction of the Francis Bacon Studio in Dublin,” 101–102.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

concrete objects, the artist's studio, the space of artistic production, became a highly charged arena."<sup>51</sup> *500 Capp Street* is more than a house or a place of artistic production and presentation, it is an artwork that acts as a structure for a system of ordinary, yet organized, task-like performances and material residue, which all connect back to the relationship between the artist and the house.

With this in mind, one might classify *500 Capp Street* as an index of the activities and materials from Ireland's artistic practice. In the essay "Notes on the Index," art historian Rosalind Krauss explains the index in relation to 1970s art in America: "As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify."<sup>52</sup> The cause in the case of Ireland's practice was the relationship—built from labor and observation—between the artist, his house, and the objects. Ireland understood the importance of making these relationships visible within *500 Capp Street* as a means to preserve and maintain his own legacy. In an interview, the artist spoke about what might happen to the objects inside of the house after his death, he said: "[This chair] can have a more honorable past by me leaving it in the house than if I take it to the flea market or take it to someplace.... [S]omeone along the way will say, "Well, it's not a very interesting chair," and then sell it. But if I put it here in this house with the other relics, then I think they would say, "Well

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<sup>51</sup> Molesworth, *Worth Ethic*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Krauss, "Notes on the Index," 70.

this is quite special.”<sup>53</sup> How does the value of the chair increase by living in *500 Capp Street*? If the house is an artwork, then do all objects within it also become artworks by means of association? And if the interior of the house were to be reconstructed in a museum, like the studios of Brancusi and Bacon, could it still be interpreted as an artwork?

In 1988, Ireland proposed an art installation for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (L.A. MoCA). In the artist’s sketches of the unrealized project, the gallery walls are yellow in color due to the build up of many coats of urethane, much like the preserved surfaces of his house. In the center of the gallery is a large pile of dirt, proposed by Ireland to be excavated from the basement of *500 Capp Street* (see appendix C).<sup>54</sup> It is possible to argue that his attempt to make an indexical reference to *500 Capp Street* within the “white cube”<sup>55</sup> of the gallery—a space that is intentionally discrete and cut off from reality—would leave the audience unable to interpret the connection. The yellow walls and the pile of dirt may appear trivial without an understanding of where it came from. Regarding the index, Krauss explains: “It is the meaningless meaning that is instituted through the terms of the index.”<sup>56</sup> How, then, can a reference to Ireland’s work at *500 Capp Street* be transferred to another location?

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<sup>53</sup> Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Ireland used to “call [his] basement [a] gold mine.” Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1986. First published in 1976 as a series of three articles in *Artforum*.

<sup>56</sup> Krauss, “Notes on the Index,” 78.

Perhaps the conditions of the clean and understated white walls of a gallery could not provide the type of surfaces or situations that Ireland required to reenact his maintenance and preservation activities. These labor actions required a space where the artist could perform them. For example, in 1986, Ireland, in collaboration with San Francisco Bay Area sculptor Mark Thompson, was commissioned by the Headlands Center for the Arts to renovate the stairwell and second floor meeting rooms of their historic building.<sup>57</sup> Ireland and Thompson went about cleaning and stripping layers of paint from the walls and lastly preserving them with the same technique that Ireland had implemented at *500 Capp Street* (see fig. 47). One might find the result of these processes within the old building as an obvious connection to *500 Capp Street* through the artist's reenactment of activities, rather than through a superficial representation of the house.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ireland was also commissioned to design a circular, tiered seating system with architect Mark Mack. "When Headlands Center for the Arts took up residence at historic Fort Barry in 1984, part of [their] mandate was to rehabilitate and steward the historic structures that would comprise our campus." Headlands Center for the Arts, "Buildings and Commissions," accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.headlands.org/about/building-commissions/>.

<sup>58</sup> Another example is 65 Capp Street, a second house purchased by Ireland in 1979, which was obviously inspired by his work at *500 Capp Street* and yet with a different set of goals in mind. At 65 Capp Street, Ireland designed and remodeled the 1904 single story house into a completely new structure that engaged the temporal and diurnal conditions of light (see fig. 48 and 49). In 1983, San Francisco curator Ann Hatch purchased 65 Capp Street from Ireland and established a site-specific artist residency program at the house called Capp Street Projects. The residency program invited artists to live at the house while simultaneously making a new work in response to the architectural site until it moved locations in 1990. See Capp Street Project, *Capp Street Project, 1984* (San Francisco: The Project, 1984).

It is still to be determined how *500 Capp Street* will be perceived in Ireland's absence. The actions of artists in their homes, studios, and live-work spaces require continual research and interpretation. One cannot assume that the perpetuation of the actual place of artistic production, frozen in time, can fully convey the dynamic process of the artist or the relationships made between the two. It is through research in archives and of performance documentation, in addition to experiencing the physical space and the remaining objects, that one might continue to make connections, making visible a complex matrix of relationships.

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## FIGURES

All artwork by David Ireland and courtesy of 500 Capp Street Foundation unless otherwise noted.



Figure 1. *500 Capp Street* (exterior), San Francisco, 1983.  
Photograph by M. Lee Fatherree.

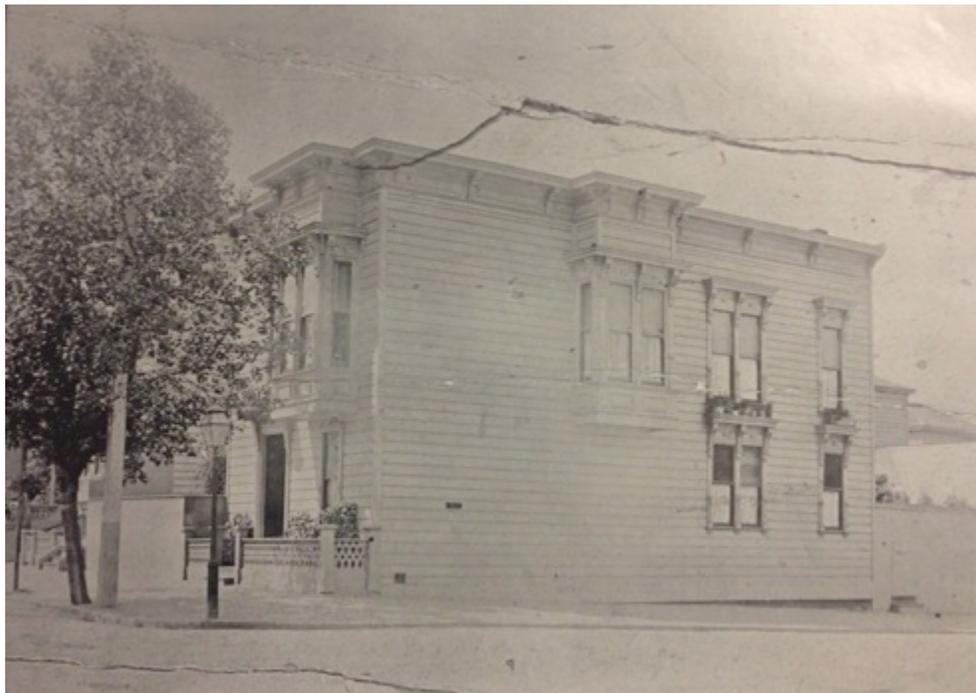


Figure 2. Oldest image of 500 Capp Street, c. 1886.



Figure 3. Installation view from exhibition *David Ireland: Skellig*, Ansel Adams Center for Photography, San Francisco, 1994.

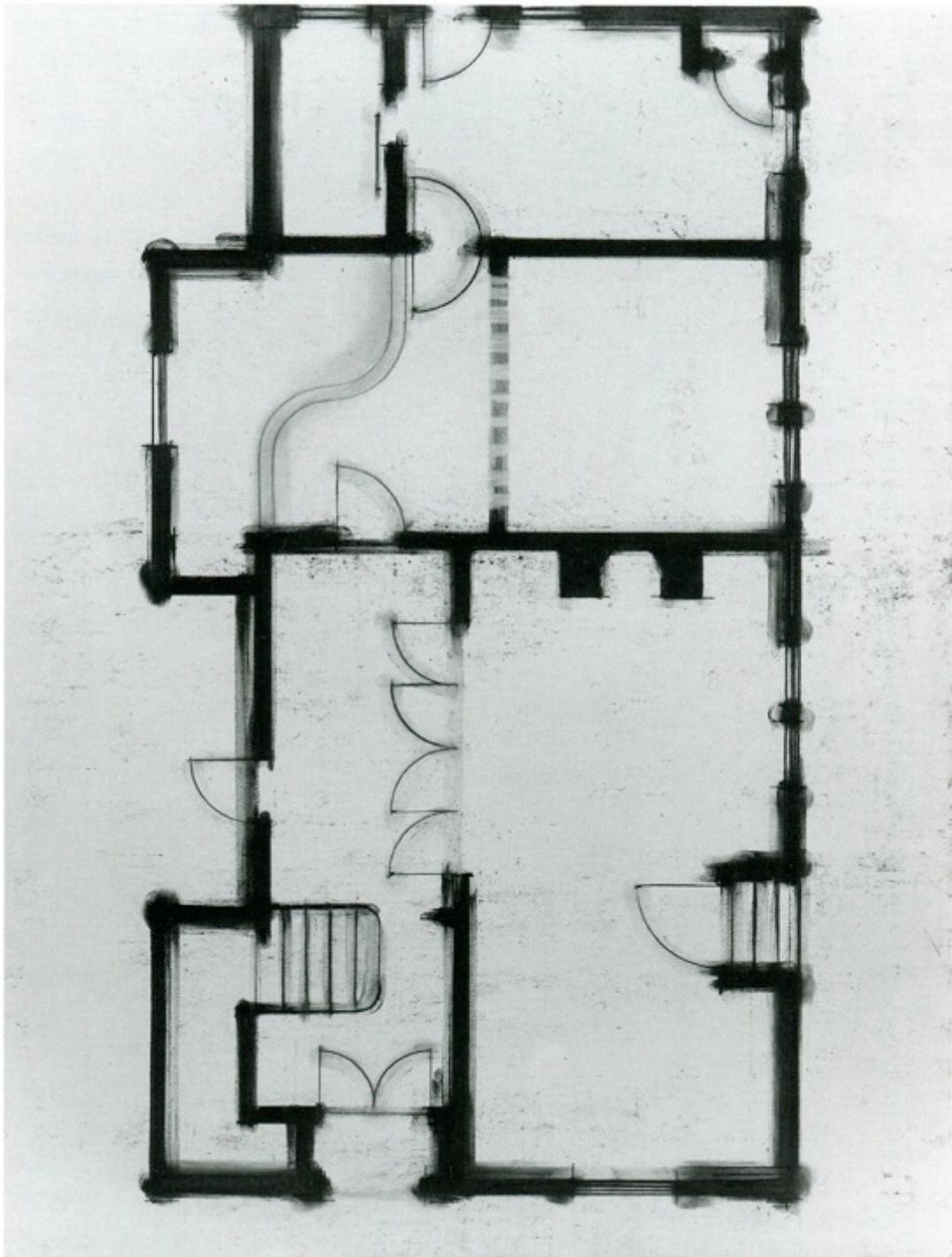


Figure 4. *Ground Floor Plan of 500 Capp Street, 1976–77.*  
Graphite on paper, 25 x 19 inches.



Figure 5. David Ireland removing wallpaper at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 6. David Ireland removing wallpaper at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 7. David Ireland removing molding at 500 *Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 8. David Ireland removing molding at 500 *Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 9. David Ireland scrubbing the window frames at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 10. David Ireland scrubbing the window frames at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 11. David Ireland working on the window frames at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 12. David Ireland vacuuming the window frames at *500 Capp Street, 1977*.



Figure 13. David Ireland sanding the walls at *500 Capp Street, 1977*.



Figure 14. David Ireland cleaning the baseboards at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 15. David Ireland cleaning the baseboards at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.

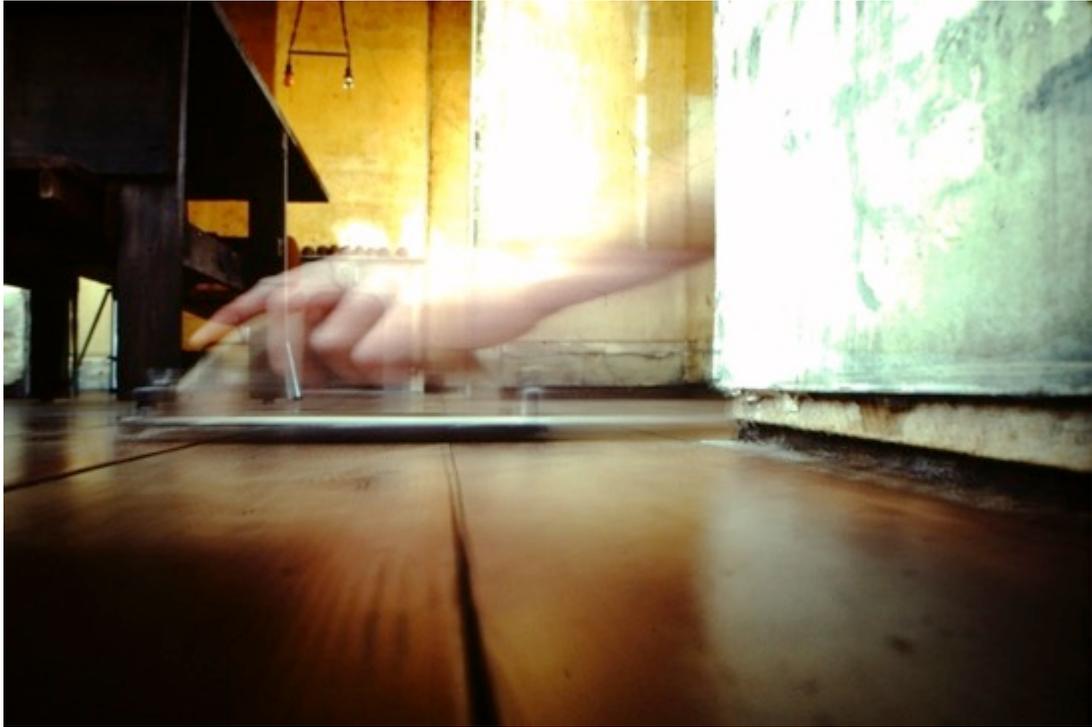


Figure 16. David Ireland sanding the floors at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.

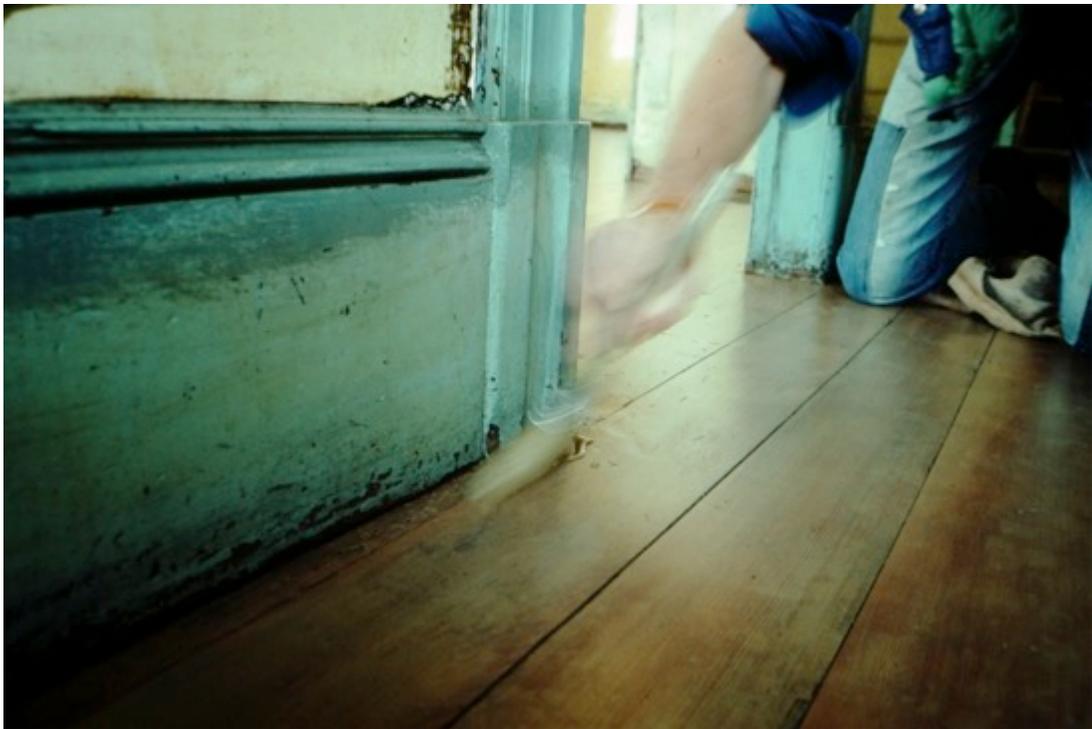


Figure 17. David Ireland sweeping the floors at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 18. David Ireland sweeping the floors at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 19. David Ireland stripping the floors at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 20. David Ireland stripping the floors at *500 Capp Street*, 1977.



Figure 21. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside*, 1973. Black and white photograph of performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.

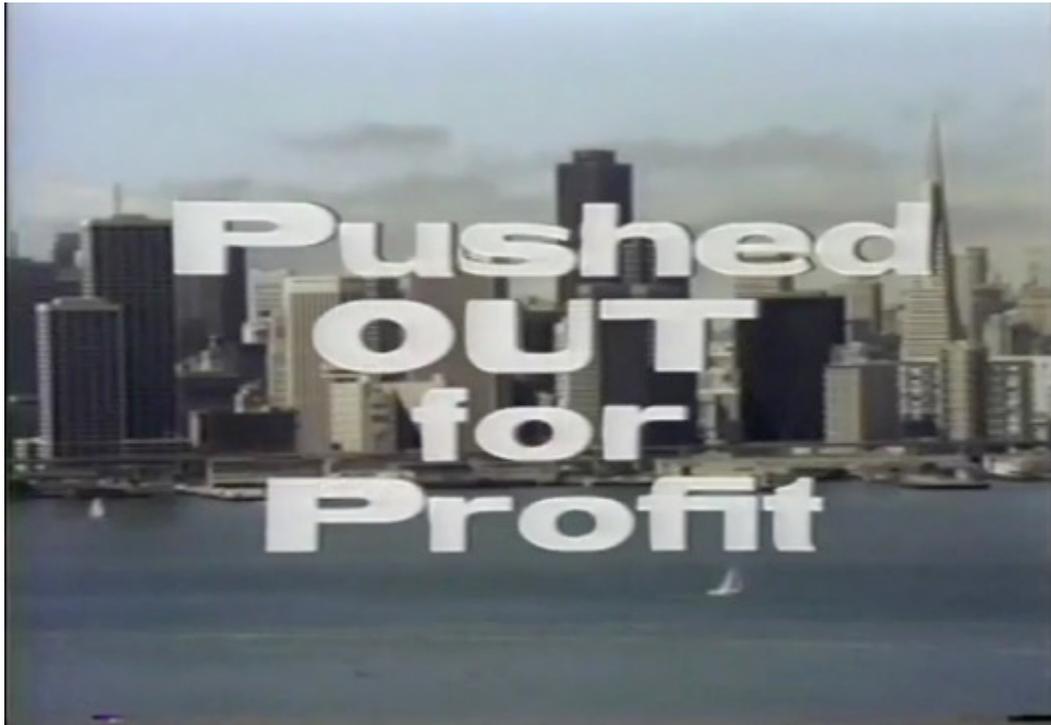


Figure 22. Optic Nerve and Charles Bolton, “Pushed Out for Profit,” 1978. Video still.

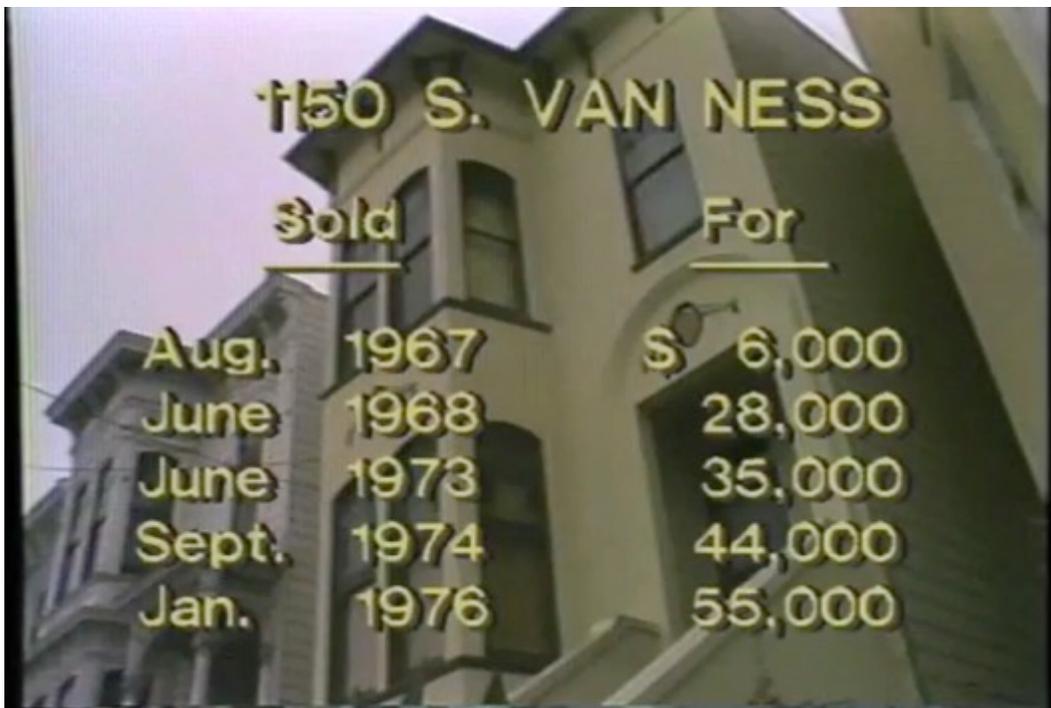


Figure 23. Optic Nerve and Charles Bolton, “Pushed Out for Profit,” 1978. Video still.



Figure 24. David Ireland repairing the sidewalk in front of *500 Capp Street*, San Francisco, 1976. Photograph by Tom Marioni.



Figure 25. Tony Labat videotaping David Ireland stripping the floors  
at 500 Capp Street, 1977.



Figure 26. Tony Labat videotaping David Ireland stripping the floors  
at 500 Capp Street, 1977.

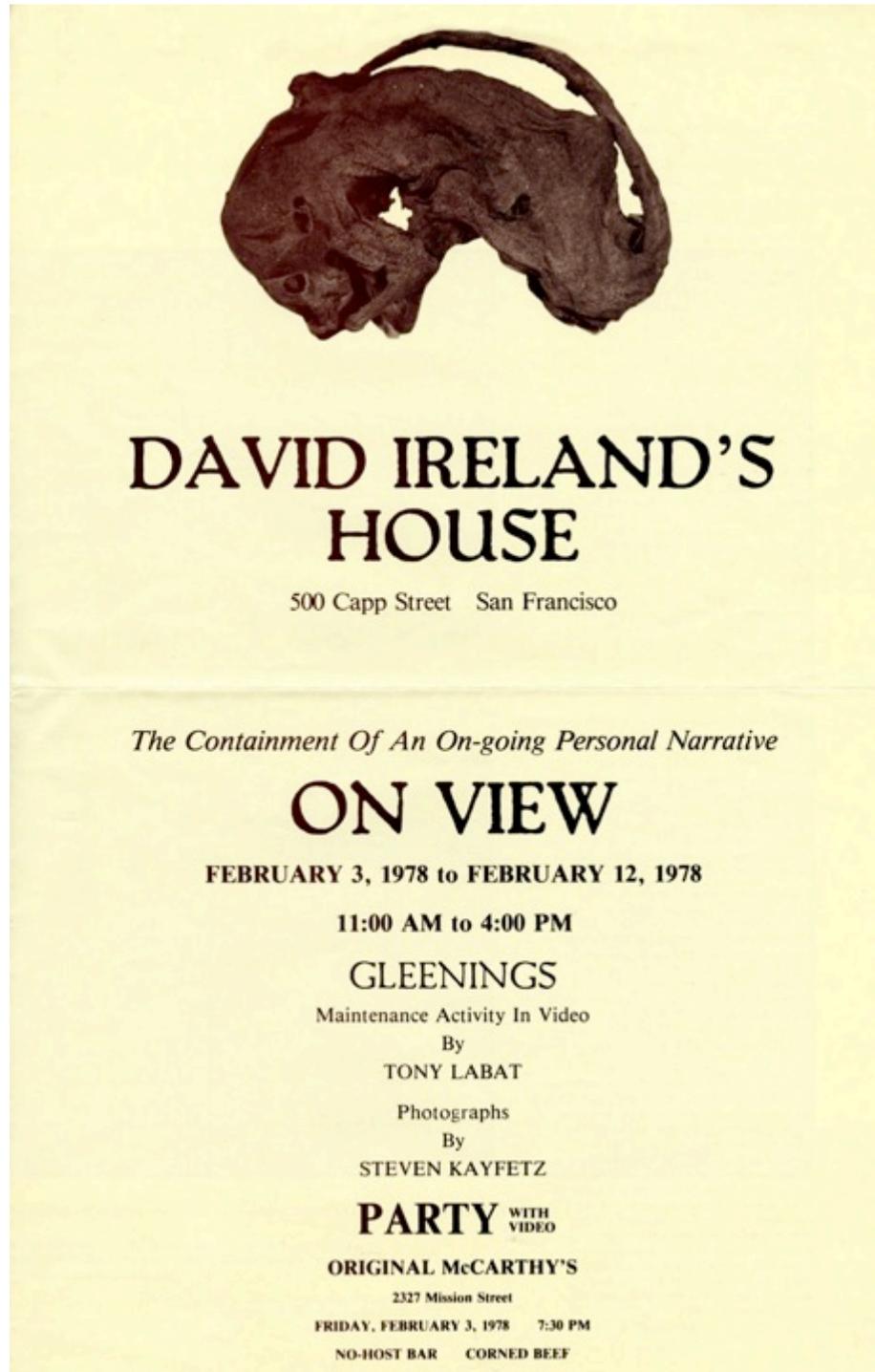


Figure 27. Poster (front) advertising the exhibition of *500 Capp Street* from February 3 to February 12, 1978 (11:00am to 4:00pm), with Maintenance Activity in video by Tony Labat and photographs by Steven Kayfetz.

"It is with feelings of the greatest diffidence that I place the following pages before the public; but those of my many friends who happen to have heard of my rather unique experiences in the wilds have so often urged me to write an account of my adventures, that after much hesitation I at last determined to do so."

— J. H. PARRSON  
"The Man-Eaters of Tibet"  
Circa 1900

If you were an explorer in the middle of the last century and probably all of the centuries before, it was important for you to explore only what was thought to be there. Certainly you would not have wanted to make a discovery that could not be understood in the place that you were to return to. I recall hearing in Kansas about the Mount Charleston on the Adir. Plains who send their strongest warriors to the top of Kilmantario to touch the white rock. The returning warriors would explain to their chiefs, before their heads were drilled, that they had taken the shimmering rock that burned the fingers, and that it had disappeared gradually on the journey.

In 1849 a missionary named Johann Krupf traversed the inland Taro that connects the coastal region near Mombasa with the higher Wakamba country that is closer to Nairobi. Krupf climbed to a high place and from there saw to his North two snow-capped peaks. This was the discovery of Mt. Kenya, seen for the first time by a white man. When Krupf's report reached London it could not be accepted by the Royal Geographical Society for it was thought impossible that snow could exist on the equator. An eminent member of the time, a W. D. Cooley wrote: "... dogmatic assertion proves nothing of reasonable evidence of perpetual snow there is not a tittle of fact." Krupf died in 1884 two years before another explorer Joseph Thomson substantiated his earlier discovery.

I never considered that Johann Krupf was an artist, when he might have been, rather of him as a man who did what he was able to do, and from his particular place of ability made observations. The important men are those who do what they do best as individuals. They become the movers and shakers, and if their ideas survive their actions, which is the substance of history, then we call them Masters, for they were the contemporaries of a former time.

A friend of mine said to me that what we learn from history is that we never learn from history. It is so. For our expectations are based on a reflection, and we ignore our perceptions, choosing something to pursue other than what we do best. If we don't know what we do best then we continue that which survives in us, become involved with it and give it a form. For the artist it is not so much a matter of making art as it is the allowance of vision. Art lets us see things that may have been obscured by the sciences. Art lets us make observations of things that were always there, and if the things are not there then it really doesn't matter for it is just a little soon, and still it doesn't matter. — D.J. —  
January, 1978



DAVID IRELAND'S HOME, BUILT BY MARTIN C. WALTON AND COMPLETED MARCH 12, 1886

"Now I have had opportunity and time to become acquainted with the GENERAL WORTH'S Passengers, and her crew. Captain Walton, our commander, has proved himself to be a thorough seaman."

— Voyage of the General Worth To the Gold Fields and the Pacific Northwest, 1849-1854

Figure 28. Poster (back) advertising the exhibition of *500 Capp Street* from February 3 to February 12, 1978.



Figure 29. Commemorative plaque in 500 Capp Street.



Figure 30. Commemorative plaque in 500 Capp Street.



Figure 31. Interior of *500 Capp Street*, c. 1978.



Figure 32. Interior of *500 Capp Street*, c. 1978.



Figure 33. Interior of *500 Capp Street*, c. 1978.



Figure 34. *Rubber Ban Collection with Sound Accompaniment*, 1977.



Figure 35. *Broom Collection with Boom*, 1978



Figure 36. *Three-Legged Chair*, 1978.



Figure 37. *Untitled (wallpaper patties)*, 1978

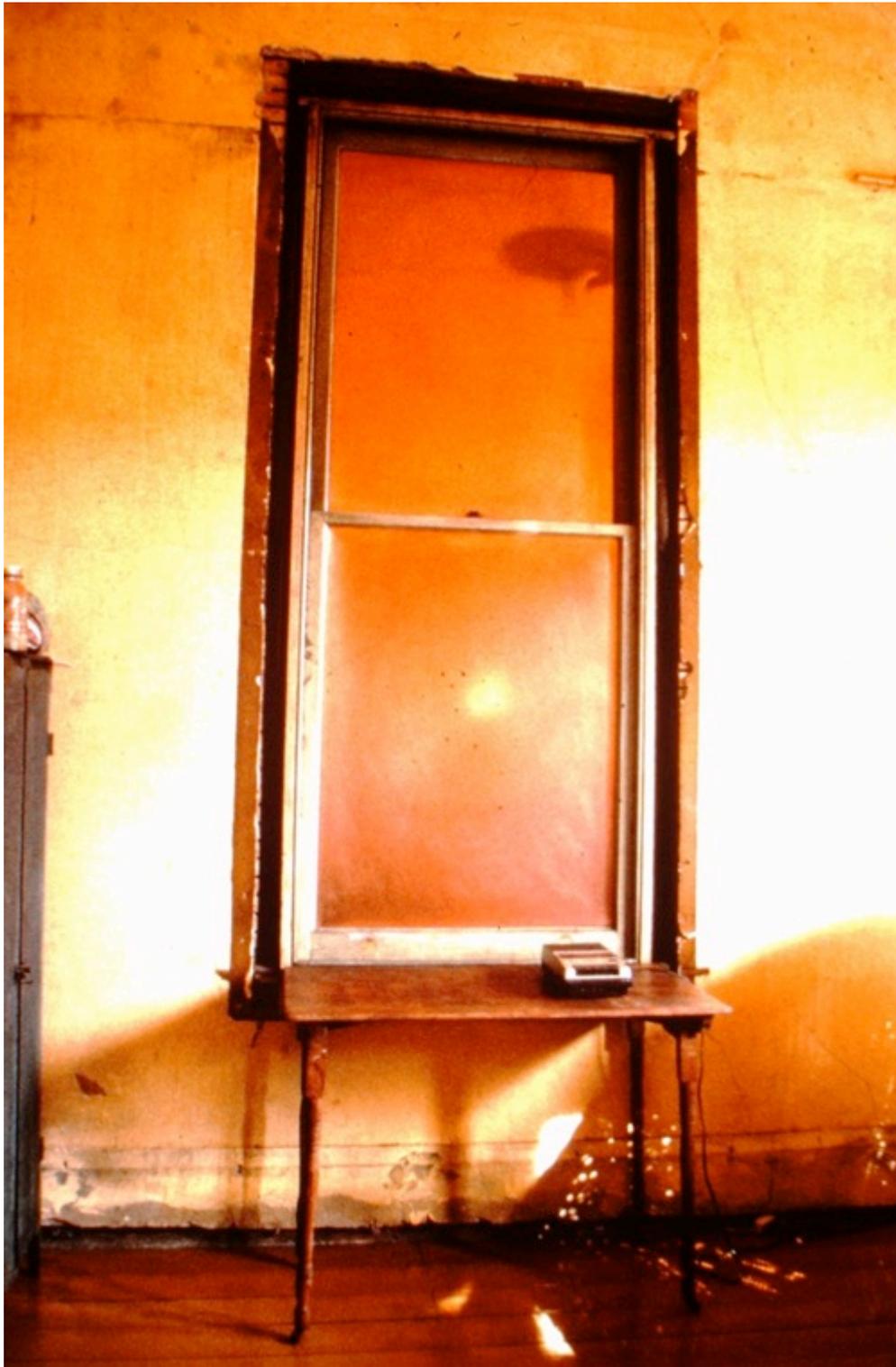


Figure 38. *Untitled (copper window)*, 1978



Figure 39. Dining room at 500 *Capp Street*.



Figure 40. Elephant's foot in the dining room of 500 *Capp Street*.



Figure 41. Chair designed by Ireland for *500 Capp Street*.

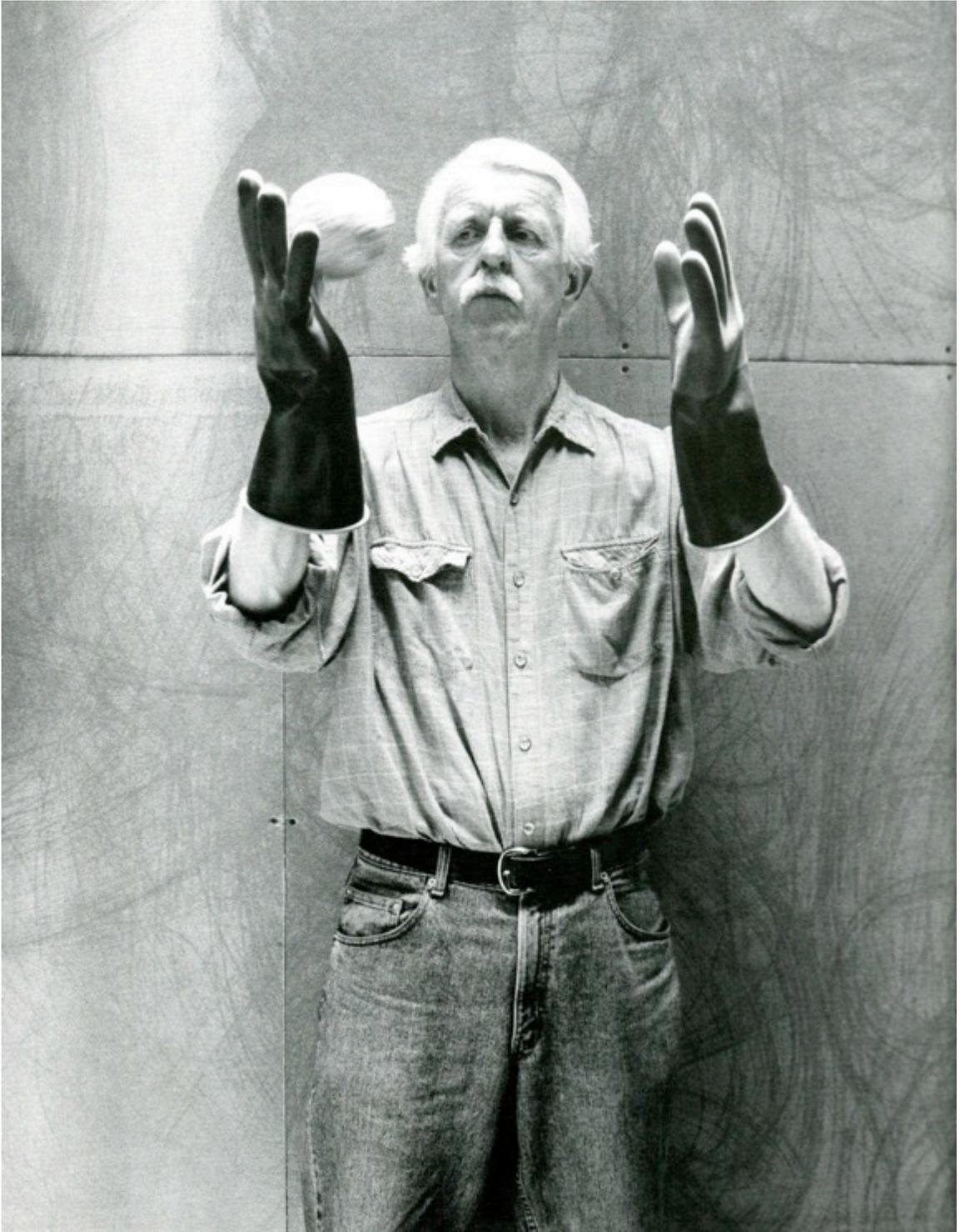


Figure 42. David Ireland making *Dumballs*, 1986.



Figure 43. Minimal arrangement of the living room at *500 Capp Street* (facing east).



Figure 44. Cluttered arrangement of the living room at *500 Capp Street* (facing southeast).



Figure 45. Constantin Brancusi's studio at the Centre George Pompidou in Paris, France.



Figure 46. Francis Bacon's studio at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Ireland.



Figure 47. Headlands Center for the Arts, Building 944, Rodeo Room, Sausalito, California, 1986–87.



Figure 48. Original structure at 65 Capp Street, San Francisco, 1978.  
Photographer unknown.



Figure 49. 65 Capp Street, San Francisco, 1982. Photograph by Henry Bowles.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

Interview with Tony Labat, February 19, 2014, San Francisco

**Lauren O’Connell:** In the archive at *500 Capp Street*, I found pictures of you videotaping David Ireland in the process of working on his house, what he calls maintenance actions. The images are documents of you recording Ireland cleaning his house, while simultaneously making your own artwork. In these moments there is a layering of documentation, process, performance, and art. Then recently, I also saw your interview in *San Francisco Arts Quarterly (SFAQ)* with the picture of your first performance in Studio 9 for a class with Howard Fried at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) in 1977, in which you are also cleaning. Can you tell me more about performing an ordinary task, such as cleaning, and how it relates to ritual, as well as its greater symbolic meaning?

**Tony Labat:** That’s interesting. I never connected those things you just pointed out...I mean this is a coincidence that I made this performance at the same time as I was videotaping David. Maybe that’s why I was perfect for the assignment of documenting him because I understood what he was doing. It’s interesting that you are connecting my performance to David’s activity of cleaning and cleansing.

**LO:** Can you tell me more about your performance?

**TL:** I arrived at SFAI in the fall of 1976 and Howard didn’t have Studio 9 as of yet, so we were having class in a closet size room with no windows between the sculpture and painting areas—it was this in between room in a hallway, which was perfect. [laughter] So that lasted for a semester and then in 1977, Howard’s class moved to Studio 9, which was the beginning of what became the performance video department and later the new genres department.

**LO:** Which you are now the head of at SFAI?

**TL:** Well there are no more departmental chairs. There is now only a BFA chair and an MFA chair. I am the MFA chair of the whole graduate program. I am trying to turn it into a new genres program, if they let me. [laughter]

Ok, let me get back to the story of my performance...I had I just come from Miami where I spent 10 years, but my formative years were in Cuba during the revolution, I was there until 1966. So I brought with me a lot of baggage and that kind of exile community that I was trying to escape from. So what I brought with me was this sort of things from Santería, from Caribbean culture. A lot of rituals, a lot of superstitions...we could go into detail, but for now I think you get my drift. I was looking for a language. I didn’t know what to say or how to say it or where to speak. By appropriating this kind of ritual, it was this idea of cleansing the space that you are going to work, live, and spend time in. It was this kind of combination as we moved into Studio 9, that my first performance, moving in the class there, was to do this sort of cleansing as you will. It involved rum, cigar smoke, and then throwing a bucket of dirty water out the door.

**LO:** How did you incorporate the rum and cigar smoke into the performance?

**TL:** I sort of sprayed the rum with my mouth into the corners of the room and I inverted the cigar into my mouth, like the hippies used to do with joints, and then I blew smoke out into the space—kind of like Cuban Feng Shui. [laughter] Making sure that things were in place and that the bad stuff was out—a clean slate, a clean palette.

**LO:** So not only cleaning the dirt off the floor, but also cleaning any sort of bad energy from the space, a spiritual cleansing.

**TL:** Yes. And setting up the space for the rest of the community.

**LO:** That's a really nice gesture.

**TL:** I was dressed in all white, which is another reference to Santería, but I don't practice that religion.

**LO:** So you used these religious rituals as a reference to your formative years in Cuba?

**TL:** It was very formal. How could I use these things that are so powerful. I was curious to see if I could translate the power of the rituals that I experienced, heard about, and read about into a very formal set. I wanted to see if as long as I believed in that moment, that the rituals would work. I was trying to take the ceremonial language out of context.

**LO:** I like that earlier you used the word appropriation.

**TL:** Yes, I was appropriating the religious rituals for my own rituals within the art context.

**LO:** This performance was photographed, but was it also videotaped?

**TL:** No. I never videotaped performances. I always hated that. For me there was a romance in the work of the artists that were influencing me. The information I was getting in Miami before I came to SFAI was mostly stills of performances with descriptions. My own preference was to give priority to the image of the performance—that frozen moment—because otherwise you would have to be there.

**LO:** So the image is purely a documentation of the performance?

**TL:** In this case, it is purely a document, because this piece was about an hour long so there were constant photographs. It was a durational piece. I may go through the mud, but it is always to arrive at one image, which might take 45 minutes. I prefer the stills.

**LO:** In your own performances, you do not videotape them and only take photographs, but you did videotape David Ireland's process at *500 Capp Street*.

**TL:** [laughter] Yeah.

**LO:** This situation was different. In this case, you are the video artist rather than the performer. Did you see yourself also as a performer in David Ireland's work?

**TL:** I think David and I were both making sculpture and we understood that without saying anything about it. It is interesting that you bring this up. I think there was a mutual enthusiasm. We hit it off right away; there was chemistry between David and me.

**LO:** Because of the house?

**TL:** Yes.

**LO:** He invited you there?

**TL:** This was a long time ago, so I will do my best, but there are things that you don't forget. David was looking for someone to document his process and Helene Fried (Howard Fried's wife) sent me there to meet him. I walked into the house and there was still wallpaper on the walls. It was a house. David did not tell me much, simply what he was about to do, that he was going to do these actions, maintenance activities like stripping the molding off the windows, sanding the floors, ripping the wallpaper off. I went, "Ok, cool. When are you starting? Monday? I will see you Monday."

**LO:** And you were excited about capturing those activities on video?

**TL:** I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I was just excited to have met him. At the time, I was also working at Tom Marioni's Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA). I was a student and was encouraged by Howard to have experiences outside of SFAI. So when these opportunities came, I went for them. I was an apprentice to Tom Marioni, as he called it. I remember it as the janitor. [laughter] I was doing these activities over at MOCA, things like fixing leaks in the roof, but in a kind of sculptural way with whatever material was around. I was cleaning sinks and absurd things that were not working anymore. Just looking at them as objects. It's really funny because you are bringing things up I never really connected. So then to go to David's made sense. What I think David and I shared were a couple of things and one was the sculptural aspect of it...we were making sculpture.

**LO:** What did you consider sculpture? Is the video you made of Ireland's performance sculpture?

**TL:** Well, the video was not going to be a documentary. It was not going to be linear. Well, it was linear in terms of the steps of taking the molding off first and then the sanding of the floor, but we never talked in the video. David never said a word, there was no interview, and I did not use documentary conventions. There is none of that. So we both thought about what was important, going back to sculpture, it was the sounds of working. Maybe I went a little overboard with the close ups, but I was making my own video work at the time. I was already very much into a certain kind of framing and this idea of sculpture as video...what is it communicating? To me it was the very aggressive sounds or the soothing ones; they had a range of different tones.

Whether he was sanding [sanding noises] with the sandpaper on the wall or the aggressiveness of the molding coming off. Then there were very quiet moments, like washing the windows. So the sound was very important and that was one thing that we shared. He wanted close ups and I wanted close ups. So I showed up at his house and this went on for a few months.

**LO:** In 1977?

**TL:** 1977. Yeah. I don't remember exactly, but it was at least 6 or 8 months. I would come whenever he was about to start and he would say, "Ok, you got some footage of sanding. Wednesday I am going to do the molding." So we would have a kind of script or schedule. From the first day we didn't say a word until I turned the camera off at the end of the day. He wouldn't say anything to me; he would just open the door and get back to what he was doing. It was kind of like sports journalism. There was no conversation about what he was going to be doing so I could start some shots—it was really on the fly. That's why the video camera was hand held. My best analogy is like shooting sports. I had to go with the action.

**LO:** This lack of communication is interesting. You mention that you had a script or schedule, but the lack of dialogue between you two allowed David to keep the authorship of his actions and you in control of how it was captured on video.

**TL:** Yes. From the beginning what I really appreciated, was that I had this impression that he had his job and I had my job. I think in retrospect that he trusted me. There was a trust. I know that when the piece was done—I was nervous to show him the final cut—of course there were things that he was not in agreement with.

**LO:** Did he let you make the decisions on what was included in the video?

**TL:** Oh yeah. At times, *a la* David, he would make some joke like, "You really went close up on that one, didn't you?" [laughter] or "I love the sound, give me more." But I didn't. I made three tapes: *David Ireland's House* (1977, 19:28 minutes), *David Ireland's House Outside* (1977), and *Lunch with Mr. Gordon* (1977). And later on I did one more tape for the Oakland Museum's exhibition...that is the sad one. I made another video of David in the house in 1988. I was doing video portraits for *SHIFT 7* magazine. The two that are my favorite are George Kuchar and David Ireland. With David, we started with him taking a shower and he takes me through a tour of all his objects, doing very eroticized actions all through the house without saying a word. That tape I really love too.

**LO:** In an interview with David Ireland, he talks about your tape *Lunch with Mr. Gordon*.<sup>59</sup> He mentions a phrase that Mr. Gordon said...

**TL:** "One donut is enough."

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<sup>59</sup> See Suzanne B. Riess, *Inside 500 Capp Street: an oral history of David Ireland's house* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 2003).

**LO:** Yes, and that it became a phrase you both would say to each other. It is interesting that although you didn't talk to each other during the videotaping, you both shared the same moment—a bond created over these times spent together.

**TL:** Oh, absolutely. We were incredibly close.

**LO:** Do you consider Ireland's work as a sort of performance?

**TL:** Of course, with the quotidian as a private stage, so performance, of course, but his performance was not aimed at a live audience, he had a task at hand. From my point of view and from David's, it was definitely a performance. There is a whole conversation around the idea that we don't act the same when a camera is turned on. Is it possible to be yourself? So it is interesting now that you are bringing things up that I hadn't thought about. But by his bringing in a camera, I think he was already set in a frame of making for others. At the time, what influenced me so much were the works of Bruce Nauman, Howard Fried, and Paul Kos. I came out of this post-studio moment and the idea of things happening in the studio. Like in Nauman's tapes, we only see this moment in the studio because we have the videos. It's kind of like reportage. So in the same sense, it was very normal to be documenting, shooting a video of what David was doing because we wanted to show the process to others, like you...so you can see it. The photos that I have seen are just too beautiful—the color and the drama—they look a little too commercial. It is a nice contrast to have the video. That early recording equipment was a drag; I had about sixty pounds on my shoulder with that old Porta-Pack. The footage was nitty-gritty, black and white, and raw. I like that because of what he was doing, for me, it was down and dirty. I don't think the video romanticizes Ireland's work—it is what it is.

**LO:** You mention the romantic idea of not videotaping a performance in order for it to be an experienced event. For the videotape of Ireland's performance, in a private setting with only the two of you present, where then does the audience come in? How do they experience Ireland's process?

**TL:** In relation to the videos I made?

**LO:** Yes, and in relation to the notion of performance, which by definition requires an audience.

**TL:** Hmm, that's a good question. Let me see if this makes sense. David finishes the house and then there is the unveiling if you will, you have probably seen the poster. I think for that event, we met at the house first and then the group moved over to an Irish bar that used to be in the Mission with a beautiful horseshoe bar top. In the bar, I played the video while people ate and drank. So that event happened. Then I really felt like my tape was done, my job was over. The video was an archive, it was a document, and I knew that it was going to be really important. But because of that, maybe I wanted to respect...I don't know what I wanted. I didn't think that I was going to show that video. It's not like I was going to hustle it and pass it around. The video is demanding, it is difficult, it's rough, it's tough, and it's punk. [laughter] Plus I had my video work, so I wanted to be careful. So if David wanted to show the tape, I have it. If anyone wanted to see the tape, I have it. But I thought my job was done. I felt it was more of a relic, an archive, and a document.

**LO:** What about the photographs taken?

**TL:** I never talked to the photographer. Once in awhile I saw this guy, he would take pictures and then leave, that was about it.

**LO:** Let's get back to the videos.

**TL:** Like I was saying, I don't think those videos have been shown for twenty or thirty years. David went on to 65 Capp Street house and the museum/gallery context. So when all of that started to happen the tape went with *500 Capp Street*. I don't think I showed that tape again until his retrospective at Oakland Museum of California. *Lunch with Mr. Gordon* and *David Ireland's House Outside* have never been shown.

**LO:** Really?

**TL:** Yeah. That is why they are so special.

**LO:** You have a relationship with Ireland, but also with the house at *500 Capp Street*. The video becomes a documentation of Ireland's process, but also becomes something of a personal relic for you, as well as an artwork. Even if the video is not exhibited, its importance is something more personal than an artwork.

**TL:** Oh yeah. That video makes me cry. I was at a point in my life and career where everything was exploding—what I knew, leaving Miami. It was also a moment of transformation for me. Hanging out with David at *500 Capp Street*, with Tom at MOCA, and Howard in Studio 9 has always symbolized that moment for me. I was lucky and privileged; I got to San Francisco at the right time—for my trajectory.

**LO:** I spoke with several people, including Marioni, Kos, and Connie Lewallen, about where David was within the lineage of Bay Area Conceptualism (BAC). It seems that he was kind of in between—he came after BAC, but also not really part of the second generation. That is he was floating in between.

**TL:** I think that is what we had in common because I was in between, as well. David and I were both in between. There was something he was beginning, there was something in transition, and there was something he was leaving behind to embark on this incredible project, and so was I.

**LO:** You both take on new meaning for your genres, taking the artwork further to a point of contextual examination.

**TL:** Yes, we had that in common.

## Appendix B

### Brief Biography of David Ireland

In 1950, Ireland moved from his hometown of Bellingham, Washington to attend the California College of the Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland, California. His first interest was in stage design for theater, and took some classes in printmaking, architectural drawing, and industrial design. It was the discovery of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's book *Vision in Motion* during his undergrad courses that introduced Ireland to Bauhaus concepts on the connection between art and life and shaped his viewpoint that all forms of art are equal. After graduating from CCAC with a bachelor's degree in Industrial Design and a minor in Printmaking, Ireland was drafted into the United States Army and was discharged in 1955, never having seen active duty. Over the next decade, Ireland traveled through Europe, lived in South Africa working as an architectural draftsman, moved back to his home town in Washington, worked as an insurance broker for his father's company, married, and had two children. In 1965, Ireland moved with his family to San Francisco and opened an import business and artifact gallery with his wife in North Beach called Hunter Africa (see fig. 2), along with a South Africa hunting and photography safari tour business (see fig. 3 and 4).

In 1972, Ireland divorced, closed his businesses, and enrolled as a graduate student at the San Francisco Art Institute with a focus in printmaking. It was Ireland's graduate advisor, Kathan Brown, who introduced him to Tom Marioni, who became one of his close friends and influences.<sup>60</sup> At the time, Marioni was the director of the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA), an artist run space in San Francisco, which opened in 1970 and was the hub for the Bay Area's first generation of conceptual artists including Marioni, Paul Kos, and Howard Fried, to name a few. Paul Kos recalls Ireland coming around and drinking beer with the other artists, as MOCA also functioned as a sort of social club, but notes Ireland's career did not take off until he began his work on *500 Capp Street*, at the age of 45.<sup>61</sup> Although Ireland was the same age as many of the first generation Bay Area conceptual artists, due to his late start he was seen as part of the second generation, which included artists such as Tony Labat.

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<sup>60</sup> Kathan Brown was also running the Crown Point Press in Oakland and is the wife of Tom Marioni. See Karen Tsujimoto, David Ireland, and Jennifer R. Gross, *The Art of David Ireland: The Way Things Are* (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Museum of California; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9–10.

<sup>61</sup> From a conversation with Paul Kos on November 13, 2013 in a class at CCA led by Renny Pritikin called "11 Exhibitions, 19 Curators, 350 Artists."

## Appendix C

500 Capp Street Archive Document: *Untitled (Buried information)*, 1988

Jeremy Stone, ASA  
Business Matters in the Visual Arts  
tel 415-641-5999  
email jstone@jeremystone.biz

Item 757	Description	Fair Market Value
<b>Artist:</b>	David IRELAND (American, 1930 – 2009)	\$2,000.00
<b>Type/Object:</b>	Work on paper	
<b>Title:</b>	<i>Untitled (Buried information)</i>	
<b>Date:</b>	1988	
<b>Medium:</b>	Graphite, painted cardboard, crayon, dirt and tissue on paper	
<b>Size:</b>	25" x 19"	
<b>Condition:</b>	Very Good - all edges soiled. Rippling due to medium. Tissue glued to back.	
<b>Framing:</b>	Unframed	
<b>Signature:</b>	"MOCA Information Center, Temporary Scheme #3 Buried Information Dirt from 500 Capp Street, San Francisco"	
<b>Provenance:</b>	Collection of the artist.	
<b>Inventory #:</b>	DI 194	
<b>Location:</b>	FF – Flat Files, Drawer 3	
<b>Description:</b>	MOCA L.A. installation plan (Buried information – dirt from 500 Capp St.)	



**Appendix D**  
 500 Capp Street Survey Field Form, 1975

street address <u>500 CAPP ST.</u>	block number <u>3610</u>	lot number <u>32</u>	summary <u>2</u>
building type/use/number of floors <u>house R 2</u>	landmark number _____		

<p><b>RELATIONSHIP WITH SURROUNDING BUILDINGS</b></p> <p>Relationship of setting to building      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Importance as contribution to a cluster/streetscape      -2 -1 0 1 2 <u>(3)</u> 4 5</p> <p><b>ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN VALUATION</b></p> <p>Facade proportions      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Richness/Excellence of detailing/decoration      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Unique visual feature of interest      0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Example of a rare or unusual style or design      0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Overall architectural quality      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> PROPOSED FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> CORNICE, PARAPET, APPENDAGE</p> <p>Importance of cornice to building design      -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Cornice contribution to streetscape      -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p><b>FACADE CONDITION</b></p> <p>Physical condition      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Paint/Material color      -2 -1 0 <u>(1)</u> 2 3 4 5</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> REMODELING</p> <p>Appropriateness of improvements      -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5</p>
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Field Notes  
ACCORDIAN SHOP

photo 46A-35

Review Notes

Junior League Listing

text     index     file

Northern California Guide

Other Listing \_\_\_\_\_

ENGLE 10-3-75  
 date

BB

## Appendix E

### 500 Capp Street Survey Field Form, 1995

<b>State of California - The Resources Agency</b> <b>DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION</b> <b>PRIMARY RECORD</b>		Primary # _____ HRI # _____ Trinomial _____ <b>CHR Status Code:</b> _____
Other Listings _____ Review Code _____	Reviewer _____ Date _____	

Page 1 of 2

Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 500 CAPP ST

**P1. Other Identifier:**\*P2. Location:  Not for Publication  Unrestricted

\*a. County: San Francisco

\*b. USGS Quad: San Francisco North, CA Date: 1995

c. Address: 500 CAPP ST

City: San Francisco

ZIP 94110

d. UTM Zone: Easting: Northing:

e. Other Locational Data: Assessor's Parcel Number 3610 032

\*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

500 Capp Street is located on a 25' x 75' rectangular corner lot on the southwest corner of Capp and 20th Streets. 500 Capp Street is a 2-story, wood frame, single family building designed in the Stick/Eastlake style. The rectangular-plan building, clad in channel drop wood siding, is capped by a hipped built-up roof. The foundation is concrete. The site features a concrete front stoop and a cast iron fence atop a low site wall.

The primary façade faces east and includes 2 structural bays. The main entry is located in the south structural bay of the façade, and features a paneled surround, door hood, and molded brackets. The recessed entrance includes paneled walls and partially-glazed arched paneled wood double door surmounted by a glazed transom. A double-hung wood-sash window with a molded surround is located in the north structural bay of the ground floor fading lettering on the window reads, "Accordians," "R. Greub;" according to the 1950 Sanborn Map, this was an accordian factory in the 1950s. (Continued)

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP2. Single Family Property

\*P4. Resources Present:  Building  Structure  Object  Site  District  Element of District  Other

P5a. Photo

**P5b. Description of Photo:**

View of primary (left) and secondary facades. 12/3/2007

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age:

 Historic  Prehistoric  Both

1886 SF Chronicle 1/6/08

\*P7. Owner and Address

IRELAND DAVID REVOCABLE TR

DAVID IRELAND TRUSTEE

1550 SUTTER ST #528

SAN FRANCISCO CA

\*P8. Recorded By:

Page &amp; Turnbull, Inc. (CD)

724 Pine Street

San Francisco, CA 94108

\*P9. Date Recorded: 12/10/2007

\*P10. Survey Type:

Reconnaissance

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "None")

Eastern Neighborhoods Mission Survey

\*Attachments:  NONE  Location Map  Sketch Map  Continuation Sheet  Building, Structure, and Object Record Archaeological Record  District Record  Linear Feature Record  Milling Station Record  Rock Art Record Artifact Record  Photograph Record  Other (list):

DPR 523 A (1/95)

\*Required Information

State of California - The Resources Agency  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
 CONTINUATION SHEET

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
 HRI # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 2

Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 500 CAPP ST

\*Recorded By: Page & Turnbull, Inc. (CD)

\*Date Recorded: December 2007  Continuation  Update

\*P3a: Description (continued):

The south structural bay of the second story contains a double-hung wood-sash window with a molded surround, window hood, and decorative brackets. The north structural bay includes a square bay window supported by large carved brackets. The bay window features double-hung wood-sash windows, a spandrel panel, decorative frieze, window hood, and brackets. The primary façade terminates in a parapet with a paneled frieze, brackets, and a projecting cornice.

The secondary façade on 20th Street includes 4 structural bays. The ground floor features a paneled wood door and 3 windows with molded surrounds and bracketed window hoods. The windows are covered with wood slatted shutters. The second story contains two single windows, one paired window, and one square bay window that are identical in type, materials, and ornament to those on the primary façade. The secondary façade terminates in features identical to those on the primary façade. The secondary façade also features two boarded up basement windows.

The building is set back from the sidewalk several feet. Two garages were added to the west of the secondary façade.

The building appears to be in good condition.