

Curtis, Cathy, "LA Alive," Los Angeles Times Calendar, June 8, 1988, Part VI, pp.1-8

"The Annotated Lipchitz," is the brainchild of John White, painter and sculptor best known for his major contribution to Los Angeles performance art. Starring the extra-beefy guys and small-boned women collectively known as the Shrimps, a truckload of Salvation Army furniture and a "sound sculpture" by Michael Brewster, the 30-minute performance piece will interact in unexpected ways with Jacques Lipchitz's "Peace on Earth" sculpture and the fountain in the plaza.

White spent nearly 20 years in the rarefied world of performance art, making affable chalk-talk pieces heavily dependent on humorous word games, before he "retired" to his Venice studio in 1986 to concentrate on his painting.

"I said to myself about a year ago that performance has gone so uptown and become such a large form involving a large budget and theater people and production people," White recalled recently. "I felt that a lot of artists were losing control of the medium."

So what induced him to create "The Annotated Lipchitz"?

Well, there's nothing like a spot of cash. The award for the winner of the LA Alive! Art competition was \$8,000, eight times the amount of money White usually had to spend on a piece. With a full wallet he could afford to hire the Shrimps, with whom he'd worked before, commission a work from Brewster (whose acoustic sculptures have been shown at major museums, including the Museum on Contemporary Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), buy decent props, sign on some good sound technicians and even take everybody out to dinner after rehearsals.

To determine exactly what he would do with the site, he hung out at midday, watching the behavior of tour groups and office workers on their lunch hour. He saw that they all ignored the black sculpture of a dove holding in its beak the upturned skirts of a squat female figure held aloft by human and animal figures.

Then the fountain went shooting up and everybody paid attention. Aha, thought White. "Why don't I have a piece that focuses on the Lipchitz and the water and keeps the audience's attention for about 30 minutes."

He decided to have the Shrimps walk out from behind the audience, "moving quickly at a high, upbeat pace" as they tote ladders, tires, baseball gloves, couches and other ordinary items – all painted black like the sculpture – to the accompaniment of a heavy, pounding sound. The women do the heavy-duty moving, and the heavy-set guys come off as weaklings.

Then, when the forest of variously sized objects is spread out on the plaza, the fountain leaps upward and is immediately shut off. ("It goes pwwww and just stops.") In the resulting silence, Brewster's piece starts.

"He'll be sitting in a little box, making sounds with the things he brings," White said. "A feeling like a wave will come over the audience but it'll be abstract, not wave sounds."

At the end, after activities that are mostly plotted in advance but with a generous leeway for improvisation . (a hallmark of White's performance pieces), the Shrimps

remove all the objects, "so you see the beginning, middle and end of how a piece is put together."

And what does all of this have to do with Lipchitz's "Peace on Earth"? Is the piece some kind of homage to the late French sculptor?

Not exactly. And no, it's not intended as a butt of humor either. For White, whose drawings often contain a central mountain shape and who drew from Lipchitz's models during his student days, the sculpture is essentially "a large shape that was familiar to me."

White has thrown himself into creating a piece with broad appeal, so much so that he has discouraged artist friends from attending the two performances (3pm Saturday, 4pm Sunday).

And yet, he says, "I've shown it to some people and they've said, "Don't worry, john, it's not a watered down piece. It still says art."