



CHIEF WITH CHERRIES

# Chief with Cherries

Leonard Harowitz

"...G. was sitting on the floor mending a carpet exactly as the Persian had done. Wools of various colors were strewn around him and in his hand was the same kind of hook I had seen with the Persian. It transpired that he had cut it with an ordinary file from the blade of a cheap penknife and, in the course of the morning, had fathomed all the mysteries of carpet mending. He told me a great deal about carpets which, as he often said, represented one of the most ancient forms of art. He spoke of the ancient customs connected with carpet making in certain parts of Asia; of a whole village working together at one carpet; of winter evenings when all the villagers, young and old, gather together in one large building and, dividing into groups, sit or stand on the floor in an order previously known and determined by tradition. Each group then begins its own work. Some pick stones and splinters out of the wool. Others beat out the wool with sticks. A third group combs the wool. The fourth spins. The fifth dyes the wool. The sixth or maybe the twenty-sixth weaves the actual carpet. Men, women and children, old men and old

women, all have their own traditional work. And all the work is done to the accompaniment of music and singing. The women spinners with spindles in their hands dance a special dance as they work, and all the movements of all the people engaged in different work are like one movement in one and the same rhythm. Moreover each locality has its own special tune, its own special songs and dances, connected with carpet making from time immemorial. And as he told me this the thought flashed across my mind that perhaps the design and coloring of the carpets are connected with the music, the notes by which the tunes could be reproduced. There was nothing strange in this idea to me as I could often "see" music in the form of a complicated design"... [from "In Search of The Miraculous" by P.D. Ouspensky]

Jeff Way is an artist who lives in Soho. He recently had an exhibition at the Whitney Museum called "Chief with Cherries". Though the show at the Whitney is over, it really doesn't matter, since the project is an ongoing "work in progress" (for the last three

years) and it might eventually include you...if you are interested enough to contact him. I find this a relatively unique idea...of artists interacting with each other. (Malcolm Morley, myself and Gene Kates did a collaborative painting in 1958).

Jeff Way is not the first artist to invite others to participate in a work (Ray Johnsons' Correspondence School) and the "Information 70" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art...where the audience was invited to involve themselves in a variety of works, including entries onto blank paper provided in a loose-leaf book, where one could write, comment, draw, combine... whatever...in any way they desired. I used to visit this particular work almost daily... make my drawing...and look at what others had done. This gave me a great deal of satisfaction and I sense this same openness, friendliness and sense of humor in Jeff Ways work.

He began "Chief with Cherries" by making a collage from a reproduction of a photograph of an American Indian and combining it with cherry decals. The alteration of the little was part of the initial concept and the organization involved in making a group "Friendship Quilt" provided Jeff with his initial inspiration. He xeroxed copies of the original collage and gave two copies to friends and asked them to do something... anything to one and then return it to him. The second copy was for each artist to keep as an exchange. The returned copies are placed in a loose leaf binder and when the artist returns their contribution...they also have an opportunity to see the entire work.

At present there are twelve volumes of the books, six by others and six by Jeff Way. This amounts to nearly one thousand pieces and the work continues to expand. He also has a number of larger (18"x24") versions, some small paintings and about 400 slides which can be continuously projected. By maintaining the image as a constant point of departure, Jeff has begun to move beyond the limits of a specific style or way of working. This is not to say that each piece is radically different, but that there is a developing range of possibilities which appear different.

His Whitney show was arranged by Elkke Solomon who, when she came down to Jeff's studio exclaimed: "I can't believe that I am having such a good time". That's the way I felt when I saw the work on the walls, each one slipped into a plastic pocket and just tacked to the wall. It made me smile. The whole show was brought up in a briefcase and could go anywhere.

Jeff Way has an interesting

background. He danced as a child (his mother and sister are dancers) and he again danced in college. In high school and college he was a football player and in Chief with Cherries was a four part series of Jeff as a football senior. In high school, football was the only thing he liked to do and refers to this as early art training, because the kind of energy you use as a football player (directing your attention...concentrating) is similar to painting..."Where you deal with focused energy as a day to day continual process. In football, you have to practice every day...use your body." The only difference he found was that in art...you also use your mind.

Jeff majored in American and European history at Kenyon College..Ohio. There was no regular art history or studio courses, but one teacher (Joe Slate) taught a course in both and influenced Jeff to become an artist. (David Diaio was also in the same class). So Jeff moved from history to art history to painting to collage. He has always been involved with painting and collage...one reinforces the other.

The birth of the idea of Chief with Cherries came about this way: Jeff was teaching a design course at Sarah Lawrence and one of his students started sending him little collages...little objects in the mail. In order to encourage her, he started to make his own and send things back to her. During the summer of 1971, he found a photograph of an American Indian picture book by photographer L.A. Huffman. He cut it out and used it as the theme for Chief with Cherries. Previously, he had worked with fruit decals

in other collages. He put cherry decals in the space all around the Indian.

Jeff had been utilizing Xerox as part of his collage process since 1966. He liked the psychological distancing... transformation and alteration that takes place in the reproduction. It gives it a different presence. By photostating or xeroxing, all the collage elements noticeable in the original...become one unified surface.

Chief with Cherries has made Jeff realize that anything he does can be construed as important...no more distinctions between high and low art... its all part of the work. It interegrates parts of his past, present and future into one consciousness. Chief with Cherries deals with recollections of his childhood memories...he collected miniature hand painted American Indian toys as a child...he read about Indians and, where he grew up (Waverly, Ohio) there are Indian mounds. Jeff Way feels that this process is infinite... that its all one piece.

He feels that Chief with Cherries is involved with psychological and poetic imagery, presents a different range of expressive possibilities than abstract painting (he also does some) and he believes that if an artist puts together various disciplines into a work...then it is unified by that artists total being...but...had it not been for the participatory involvement... Chief with Cherries wouldn't exist...because it was when he saw a range of peoples responses that this image became evocative in many, many ways.

## Paris Letter

Joanna Rees

*The verbal meanderings of an art watcher 3000 miles from home are usually meaningless to the reader unless he has some chance of seeing the exhibitions described. I have therefore chosen to report the two fine exhibitions here which continue well into 1975.*

### Drawings At The Museum Of Modern Art

The Museum of Modern Art in Paris is an institution designed to send the color conscious insane. Its overload of exceptional 20th Century art constitutes a nightmarish fantasy of lunacy by proxy: something so powerfully creative that the struggling imagination of the individual sinks under the abundance of it all without ever coming in contact with the weapon's maker. Roomfuls of Roualt icons encourage religious phobia; huge bronze ladies by Matisse merge back into the stone of their origin but are petrified en route; Delaunay sends one

spiralling into never ending circles of color, the full spectrum blanketing out walls up to 30 yards long. Cubism fragments, whole inner rooms in angular monochrome and the Nabis dream exposes a subworld of disconcerting calm in the confusion of it all. Brancusi is touchable here, covertly if not legally, and the effect of skin on smoothe polished bronze is quite orgasmic. In the sculpture basement his Paris atelier is reconstructed and is a sincerely refreshing contrast to the unapproachably sterile' collection at MOMA. Wet lipped prostitutes of the German expressionists are bare assed nymphs by Klimt, the busy over-exposures of the futurists and Leger's cylindrical, mechanized bodies, all make one ultimately run from the building into the Citroen cluttered cobblestones of the Avenue of the Seine, for some semblance of the sobering seventies.

It is not surprising then that the exhibition of drawings from the museum's own collection is