

# DON CELENDER



**11 BOOKS**

**PUBLIC COLLECTORS STUDY CENTER**



# DON CELENDER: 11 BOOKS

When Don Celender died in 2005, he left behind an unusually focused and accessible body of work that is ripe for rediscovery. Younger audiences and those who did not see his solo exhibitions (almost all presented in New York), or have yet to encounter his books (mostly self-published and hard to find) are unfamiliar with this underrated Conceptual artist.

Celender lived most of his life in St. Paul, Minnesota where he taught Art History and chaired the Art department at Macalester College for over forty years. Celender's books and exhibits most frequently took the form of collected results from surveys. These surveys, often printed on official Macalester College stationary, were primarily conducted through the mail. Despite a great deal of writing about social practices and participatory artworks in recent years, mentions of Don Celender's many survey projects, all dependent on the voices and participation of others, are absent from this critical discourse. Rather than taking his Ph.D. and retreating into the most obscure recesses of research and academia, Celender often used his deep knowledge of art history and his concern with art's place in society to create a playful and humorous engagement with art and culture that could be accessible to a broad range of readers.

The structure of Celender's books is consistent, for the most part. Most are 8.5" X 11", standard U.S. letter paper size, and all are printed in black ink on white paper. Each starts with a brief introduction followed by reproductions of selected replies. This booklet reproduces Celender's introductions from each title (when they are included). The following short texts are brief synopses and reviews of each book in the exhibition:

POLITICAL ART MOVEMENT, RELIGIOUS ART MOVEMENT, AFFLUENT ART MOVEMENT, ACADEMIC ART MOVEMENT, CORPORATE ART MOVEMENT, CULTURAL ART MOVEMENT, MASS MEDIA ART MOVEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL ART MOVEMENT (1972). For this study, Celender contacted "about twenty-five chief executive officers of major organizations" from each of the eight movements he describes at the beginning of the book. Each officer was sent an idea by Celender and invited to execute it as a means of bringing art to a wider public. The project was intended as an opportunity to disseminate art in the form of ideas and observe the officials' attitudes toward art through their responses to these impossible proposals. Some officials replied with considerable wit, others appeared incapable of humor and playfulness, and naturally some officials did not reply at all – or had their staff handle the task of acknowledging the proposal.

Two proposals:

To Michael L. Haider, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, Celender requests that they: "Change all current pipe lines to clear plastic and place them above ground on illuminated supports so that oil can be seen moving from the refineries to points of distribution. You will be creating, in effect, continuous linear forms in flux or liquid illuminated sculpture in motion." The letter received a response that goes into lengthy and dry detail about the primary use of steel piping, closing with the note: "Even if the use of plastic pipe were technically feasible, the cost would be prohibitive."

To Gilbert H. Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society: "Skip one issue of your magazine and use the ink to fill the fissures of the 49 earthquakes in Alaska in 1969. Once the above has been accomplished, press the paper of the skipped issue into the fissures and exhibit the resulting imprints in the Mayo

Clinic." A reply mailed back to Celender from another representative states that this project did "not fall within the scope of the Society's activities."

THE OLYMPICS OF ART (1973). This book includes portraits of various art world luminaries and institutions, captioned with awards bestowed upon them by Celender. Examples are: "Leading Copycat Artist of an Artist Father" (Jamie Wyeth), "Hardest to Find Elevator in a Museum" (The Brooklyn Museum), "Most Hostile Gallery Atmosphere" (Marlborough Gallery, Inc.), "Worst Dressed Critic" (Max Kozloff) and "Dullest Critic" (Michael Fried). The book is filled with cheap shots as well as compliments that are pretty obviously bestowed upon people the artist must have known. One senses here how much smaller the commercial New York-centric art world was in the early 1970s.

MUSEUM PIECE (1975). Celender wrote letters to museums around the world asking for photos of their loading docks or receiving areas. Many institutions complied, often taking original photos because documentation did not readily exist. The letters and photographic results are contrasted with more common postcard views of the main façade of each institution. MUSEUM PIECE reveals the least aesthetically pleasing and impressive architectural details of each institution that has a loading dock.

OPINIONS OF WORKING PEOPLE CONCERNING THE ARTS (1975). While teaching a course called "Art of the Last Ten Years", Celender had Macalester College students solicit written and recorded opinions from 400 working people in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota area. The result is a book (published for an exhibition at OK Harris Gallery in New York City) that includes the responses of maids, bus drivers, hotel clerks, bartenders, gas station attendants, security officers, roofers, cab drivers, and more. Among the questions answered are: "Do you think art is important to American life? Why?" "Should tax money be spent to assist artists in producing works of art?" "Do you go to museums?" "What do you like best at museums? What do you like least?" "Do you think artists are responsible citizens?" "Do you think artists, as a group, have a particular political position?" "Would you pay as much for a work of art as you would for your car? Your TV? A dress, or suit?"

A photo of the participant along with his or her name, age, occupation, and residence accompanies each survey result. Though most of the responses are brief and lack detail, the book is a fascinating window into the thoughts of many who are rarely asked for their opinions about art. Also refreshing is that with the help of students, the research was not conducted entirely through the mail from the comforts of a college office. One can sense the effort of people hitting the streets to collect the results rather than waiting for the mail delivery person to arrive.

OBSERVATION AND SCHOLARSHIP EXAMINATION FOR ART HISTORIANS, MUSEUM DIRECTORS, ARTISTS, DEALERS, AND COLLECTORS: PART TWO (1977) features a series of one hundred visual multiple choice questions where the reader must identify important works of art based on single, small cropped sections of each piece. Often these consist of less than ten percent of the entire surface span of the work in question. The reader gets four suggested choices. Answers and full images are included in the back of the book.

OBSERVATIONS, PROTESTATIONS AND LAMENTATIONS OF MUSEUM GUARDS



THROUGHOUT THE WORLD (1978). This was a particularly ambitious survey. 1,200 questionnaires were mailed out to museums and many language translations were necessary. Celender's curiosity ran high and he asked many things one would want to know including: "Have there been any thefts, or serious defacements, of works of art during your tenure?" "What are your subordinate guards most frequent complaints?" "What work, or works, do you most admire?" "Do you visit other art institutions on your day off?" "Do you engage in painting, sculpture, or crafts?" Portrait photos accompany many of the responses. Though most answers given were short, the book offers an interesting window into an employee culture that is common to every major museum. Unsurprisingly, some museums declined participation for reasons of security.

DESTINY OF A NAME (1978) explored the relationship of American surnames and their possible connectedness to the name bearer's occupation. Here Celender, and it's not clear how he came upon these individuals, surveyed an impressive range of lucky or unlucky people in the U.S.A: a dentist with the last name "Toothman," a psychologist surnamed "Reveal," a colon and rectal surgeon with the surname "Butts," a barber named "Jack Joe Barber," and a home builder named "Tommy Holmes." Though one respondent was incredulous that this was a real study (a common theme in Celender survey replies), most people gave serious answers and included a portrait photo as requested. This is Celender at his deadpan best.

NATIONAL ARCHITECTS PREFERENCE SURVEY (1979). A compilation of the most complete responses to a survey sent to 1,000 American architects asking: "If you were to advise students of architecture to see one significant structure in the world that would be the most inspiring and instructive for their future careers, which structure would you recommend?" An impressive 32% of those contacted responded. The book includes portraits of each respondent, a photo of their selection, or, for those that refused to choose one significant structure, a photo of one of the respondent's own buildings. The architects' selections are mostly of famously popular works: The Parthenon, Notre Dame, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water and Taliesin West are among those included.

REINCARNATION STUDY (1982). This book combines the results of surveys of both art world personalities and a second group of distinguished persons from other fields, asking: "If reincarnation were available to you, in what form would you like to return?" Not surprisingly, quite a few people responded that one life is enough, that they don't believe in reincarnation, or that they'd like to return as themselves (Richard Serra: "I would like to return as a Richard Serra clone"). Others wished for physical improvements in the next life (Julia Child: "Three inches shorter; feet two sizes smaller; flat stomach; capacity to eat all day and not gain a pound; Otherwise okay as is"). Artist Pierre Alechinsky answered: "Anything but being reincarnated as a professor like Donald D. Celender."

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ARTS YOU MAY NEVER HAVE THOUGHT TO ASK (1992) This slight project includes 73 pages worth of questions and answers, coupled with the source texts that each fact was drawn from. Celender's sources range from E.H. Gombrich to the Guinness Book of World Records, as well as a sly personal nod to his gallerist ("What brand of cigars does Ivan Karp prefer?").

MORTAL REMAINS (1995). Celender, in collaboration with Ricardo Bloch, surveyed four hundred contemporary artists and asked: "Where would you like your body or its remains to spend the rest of eternity? If a monument or marker were to be placed to indicate the site of your remains what would it be, and what would it say? Is there anything in particular you'd like to wear or take with you?"

These questions generally yielded longer and more thoughtful responses than the earlier reincarnation study. Mel Chin wanted his marker to say: "I knew this would happen." Bruce Conner wanted to take a toothbrush and a fluffy towel. Jenny Holzer wanted to bring along a good book. Frank Gehry writes succinctly: "Ashes at sea. No marker." Duane Michals wanted his tombstone engraved with: "Having a wonderful time, wish you were here."

Mike Kelley gave two ideas:

"1) My body burnt and the ashes dumped into Bryce Canyon, Utah. No marker. I'd like there to be a party for those who wish to remember me - I would like them to play "Starship" by the MC5 from their album "Kick Out The Jams." As loud as possible. (The romantic version)

2) Remove all identifying marks from my body and dump it somewhere so the state is stuck with the cost of dealing with it. (The political version)."

For his entire career, Celender was represented by the New York-based gallery OK Harris. A great unknown for admirers of Celender's work who missed his exhibitions in New York over the years is his long list of unpublished works, surveys and projects that now rest with his estate but were never turned into books. This thirty-five item list on Celender's CV, compiled by OK Harris Gallery, is nearly twice as long as the bibliography of works that were published in Celender's lifetime. Among the many projects: Censorship Survey (2003), National Prison Wardens Art Preference Survey (2003), Labor Activists Art Preference Survey (2003), Small and Unusual Museums Survey (1999), Military Officers Art Survey (1998), Nobel Laureates Art Preference Survey (1995), Aesthetic Experiences (1992), Apprenticeship Study (1989), Law Enforcement Officers Art Preference Survey (1988), Unmatched Garage Doors (1982), Parental Attitudes Survey (1980) and more. Hopefully this material will become accessible again one day.

It is also hoped that a monograph on Celender from A.R.T. Press will offer the best corrective on the insufficient awareness of his work. That title has been "forthcoming" for a long time, however, and the publisher hasn't responded to emails about when it might see release.

Don Celender's eighteen mostly self-published books and editions are hard to find in libraries and on the secondary market. This is the first exhibition devoted entirely to Celender's work in Chicago. It is hoped that this show, the first at the newly founded Public Collectors Study Center, will offer a small corrective to the difficulty of seeing many of Celender's books in one place. After the show closes the books will remain on view by request.

- Marc Fischer, December 2009

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Special thanks to Suzanne Kreps of OK Harris Works of Art in New York City for patiently answering my questions about Celender and providing a copy of his CV, and Jen Blair for editorial assistance.

POLITICAL ART MOVEMENT  
RELIGIOUS ART MOVEMENT  
AFFLUENT ART MOVEMENT  
ACADEMIC ART MOVEMENT  
CORPORATE ART MOVEMENT  
CULTURAL ART MOVEMENT  
MASS MEDIA ART MOVEMENT  
ORGANIZATIONAL ART MOVEMENT

*Don Celander*

POLITICAL ART MOVEMENT  
RELIGIOUS ART MOVEMENT  
AFFLUENT ART MOVEMENT  
ACADEMIC ART MOVEMENT  
CORPORATE ART MOVEMENT  
CULTURAL ART MOVEMENT  
MASS MEDIA ART MOVEMENT  
ORGANIZATIONAL ART MOVEMENT  
1972, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 124 pages

POLITICAL ART MOVEMENT  
RELIGIOUS ART MOVEMENT  
AFFLUENT ART MOVEMENT  
ACADEMIC ART MOVEMENT  
CORPORATE ART MOVEMENT  
CULTURAL ART MOVEMENT  
MASS MEDIA ART MOVEMENT  
ORGANIZATIONAL ART MOVEMENT

1972, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 124 pages

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Modern society seems to view the artist as a fabricator of objects, not a conceiver of ideas. I have become interested in conceptual art because it appears to be a valid vehicle for reiterating and expanding the score of the artist as an originator of ideas as well as a maker of objects.

Realizing that art, as it is experienced currently, reaches only a small portion of the public, my conceptual movements were initiated to explore the realm of the impossible in order to stimulate innovative and creative approaches to bringing art to the masses. Syntectics and brainstorming, two techniques which expand normal thought processes, were basic to formulation of the movements. In addition to the concept of art dissemination, these movements were motivated by the desire to survey the attitudes about art held by individuals and organizations occupying key positions in American Society.

About twenty-five chief executive officers of major organizations were contacted in each of the eight art movements. The organizational head received, in addition to his own proposal, copies of proposals sent to other principals included in the movements so that each would be aware of the scope of the concept.

- Don Celender, January 15, 1972.



# **OLYMPICS OF ART**

**1974 EDITION**

By  
**DON CELENDER**

OLYMPICS OF ART  
1973, self-published  
8.5" X 5.5", comb-bound, offset, 104 pages.



## OPINIONS OF WORKING PEOPLE CONCERNING THE ARTS



by  
DON CELENDER

## OPINIONS OF WORKING PEOPLE CONCERNING THE ARTS

1975, self-published

8.5" X 11", spiral-bound, offset, 142 pages.

### From the Introduction:

This survey was undertaken by Macalester College students enrolled in the course Art of the Last Ten Year, at the direction of their professor, Don Celender. The area surveyed from September 11, 1975, to September 27, 1975, was Minneapolis/St. Paul and their immediate surroundings. It is the intent of the survey to encompass other regions of the United States. Answers to the survey were verbal and written. The written answers were recorded as written. The total number surveyed was four-hundred. The publication contains representative responses from various classifications of workers polled.

# MUSEUM PIECE



by  
DON CELENDER

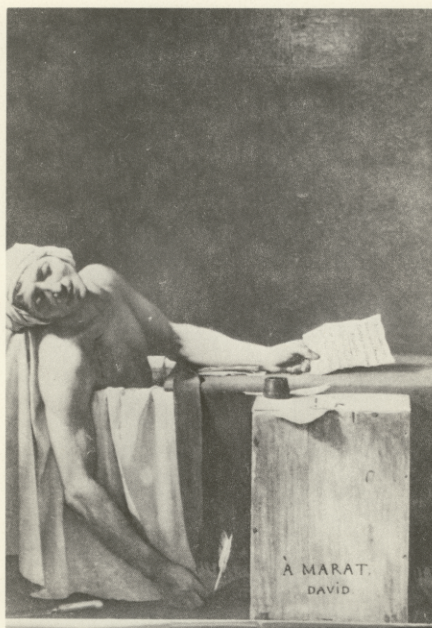
MUSEUM PIECE  
1975, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 142 pages.

I would like to thank all of the contributors to this publication, especially the photography staffs of the museums which responded, and the professional photographers, who were commissioned to photograph the loading docks and receiving areas of the museums selected for the MUSEUM PIECE.

– Don Celender, New York, New York, December 6, 1975

OBSERVATION AND SCHOLARSHIP  
EXAMINATION FOR ART HISTORIANS,  
MUSEUM DIRECTORS, ARTISTS, DEALERS,  
AND COLLECTORS

PART TWO



By  
DON CELENDER  
1977 Edition

OBSERVATION AND SCHOLARSHIP  
EXAMINATION FOR ART HISTORIANS,  
MUSEUM DIRECTORS, ARTISTS, DEALERS,  
AND COLLECTORS: PART TWO  
1977, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 80 pages.



## DESTINY OF A NAME



BY  
DON CELENDER  
1978

DESTINY OF A NAME  
1978, self-published

8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 68 pages.

### INTRODUCTION

It has been an historical fact that in certain times and in various countries of the world, surnames were descriptive of occupations. However, in the United States of America, considering the time between the great migration to America's shores at the turn of the 20th century to the present, this phenomenon has been lost.

This survey was conducted to attempt to establish remaining, or broken, connections between the family name and its logical consequence. The study was confined to the United States of America.

# OBSERVATIONS, PROTESTATIONS AND LAMENTATIONS OF MUSEUM GUARDS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD



by  
DON CELENDER  
1978

## OBSERVATIONS, PROTESTATIONS AND LAMENTATIONS OF MUSEUM GUARDS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

1978, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 88 pages.

### INTRODUCTION

This survey was conducted over a period of two years, 1976 and 1977, during which time I sent questionnaires to the Chief Security Officers of 1,200 museums in 125 countries. The percentage of response to time of publication is 46%. Translations were undertaken by Mr. Robert Dasset (Spanish and Portuguese), Dr. William P. Donovan (Greek), Dr. Jerry K. Fisher (Japanese), Mr. Alexander A. Guss (Polish and Russian), Dr. William H. Hill (Dutch and German), Mr. Eric Lam (Chinese), Dr. Phillip A. Lee (French) and myself (Italian). The selection of material included in this publications was made solely on the basis of completion of response. I would like to acknowledge many debts to Mr. Ivan C. Karp for his assistance in the preparation, execution, and editing of this survey.

# NATIONAL ARCHITECTS PREFERENCE SURVEY



by  
DON CELENDER  
1979

NATIONAL ARCHITECTS PREFERENCE SURVEY  
1979, self-published  
8.5" X 11", staple-bound, offset, 80 pages.

## INTRODUCTION

This survey was conducted over a period of two years, 1978 and 1979, during which time I sent questionnaires to approximately one-thousand American architects. The response rate to time of publication is 32%. The selection of material included in this survey was made solely on the basis of completion of response.



# REINCARNATION STUDY

Euripides said, "Who knows but life be  
that which men call death,  
and death what men call life."

Georgia O'Keeffe, the distinguished American  
painter, said she would like  
to be reincarnated as a "blond  
with a high soprano voice."  
In which form would you like to  
return?

by

Don Celender  
1982

REINCARNATION STUDY

1982, self-published

8.4" X 10.75", perfect-bound, offset, 140 pages.

## INTRODUCTION

This publication combines two exhibitions which were held at OK Harris Gallery, New York, New York, in December 1979, and December 1980. The first show titled Reincarnation Study was composed of art world personalities who responded to the question: If reincarnation were available to you, in what form would you like to return? The concept was expanded in Reincarnation Study II to include personalities who have distinguished themselves in various other categories of human endeavor.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ARTS  
YOU MAY NEVER  
HAVE THOUGHT TO ASK**

**QUESTION:** Why is the *Mona Lisa* smiling?

**ANSWER:** She is smiling because Leonardo da Vinci engaged people to play music and sing, to keep her merry in order to remove that melancholy which he thought painting gives to portraits.

**by  
Don Celender  
1992**

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ARTS YOU MAY NEVER HAVE THOUGHT TO ASK  
1992, self-published  
8.25" X 10.75", perfect-bound, offset, 84 pages.

# MORTAL REMAINS



**BLOCH / CELENDER**

MORTAL REMAINS

(In collaboration with Ricardo Bloch)

1995, self-published

8.25" X 10.75", perfect-bound, offset, 142 pages.

## INTRODUCTION

Approximately 400 creative artists were selected for the research project, MORTAL REMAINS. They were asked the following questions:

Where would you like your body or its remains to spend the rest of eternity? If a monument or marker were to be placed to indicate the site of your remains what would it be, and what would it say? Is there anything in particular you'd like to wear or take with you?



Don Celender - 11 Books  
December 2009 - February, 2010

**PUBLIC COLLECTORS STUDY CENTER**  
**2456 N. Mozart, 1st Floor**  
**Chicago, IL 60647**  
**USA**

**[www.publiccollectors.org](http://www.publiccollectors.org)**

PC0004 December 2009

Cover photo: Don Celender in his office, September 1972, by Tom Nelson.