

## ABSTRACT

Sandro Dernini, Doctor of Philosophy, 1997

Major: Art Education, Department of Art and Art Professions

Title of Dissertation: A Multicultural Aesthetic Inquiry Into "Plexus Black Box,"  
An International Community-Based Art Project.

Directed by: David W. Ecker

## ABSTRACT

This study is a multicultural aesthetic inquiry into the "Plexus Black Box," a community-based international art project.

Plexus, an international movement of artists and community intellectuals, has played a seminal role in the conception and realization of numerous large, international, interdisciplinary, collaborative, cross-cultural, multi-art events, which are an unexamined part of the contemporary history of art.

The collaborative art project under study, "Plexus Black Box," is related to a series of art events held in several communities around the world, beginning in 1982, engendering a spirit of cooperation and bridging the gap between universities and local communities.

The focus of Plexus is to raise the consciousness in the world community about the interdependencies of the arts, the well-being of individuals, and the reconciliation of cultural differences, through the extension and interaction of collaborative art events, bringing the community and the academy closer together, and linking the notion of "art" - as a culture-bound aesthetic experience - to the

concept of "well being" - as a multicultural paradigm enhancing the quality of life in the community.

The inquiry provides an aesthetic interpretation of "Plexus Black Box" as well as a comprehensive historical account of Plexus activities.

The researcher, an "insider" of the project, applies David W. Ecker's model of "The Artist as Researcher: The Role of the Artist in Advancing Living Traditions in Art," within the current issues raised by Kenneth L. Pike and Marvin Harris in Emics and Etics. The Insider/ Outsider Debate. Following John Dewey's Art as Experience perspective, "the artist as researcher" presents an emic or an "insider" aesthetic understanding of "Plexus Black Box," combining emic procedures with hermeneutic and deconstructionist interpretational methods. The inquiry offers not a "formal aesthetic" analysis of the object of the study but opens the possibility of an "insider" understanding of "Plexus Black Box" as a community-based art form.

The researcher applies the "double writing" model employed by the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida in Margins of Philosophy, and as "an insider" conducts a participatory hermeneutic inquiry following the interpretational historical perspective employed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays, and by Alfred Schutz in Reflections on the Problem of Relevance, to accomplish such a hermeneutical task.

At this time, in a multicultural world, where different values and cultures clash, and individual and cultural identification are of paramount concern for all, the study outlines an open art model to grasp possibilities of global participation, by building bridges among individuals, communities and institutions.

The assumption of the study is that a more participatory process of understanding of community-based art experiences should be invaluable in developing local and global alternative strategies for the reinforcement of mutual respect necessary to cohabit with diversity, and enhancing the advancement of art as a paramount universal human resource for the well being of humankind.