

# HA SCHULT

November 10 through  
December 10, 1988

Opening: Thursday,  
November 10, 5 to 7 p.m.

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L A M A G N A

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HA Schult is an audacious and witty West German artist who creates complex Picture Boxes which describe in three dimensions his imaginative vision of contemporary society. He describes his picture boxes as expressing the "archaeology of everyday life." Indeed, his concerns are with the excesses of western culture, the rhythms of life in a throwaway society. His colorful picture boxes are the complement to his "Action Art," which he calls "experienced pictures." The picture boxes are the Actions of his inner world.

New Yorkers may be familiar with the Action, "Now," which was billed as "a psychological trip into the presence of New York" and was staged in October 1983, during the year HA Schult and his wife, the former actress Elke Koska, lived in the city. Among other events, this particular Action included the participation of eighty or so art-impassioned Europeans flown over for the weekend to attend unusual events like a concert with tenor and grand piano underneath the Brooklyn Bridge ("the most powerful harp in the world"), break-dancers from the South Bronx performing after an elegant dinner in a bare, candle-lit Brooklyn warehouse, and a Manhattan street looking towards the World Trade Center ("symbol of Western capital") filled with thousands of crumpled pages of the *New York Times*.

Each event, each image has several layers of meaning for HA Schult. When he filled the Piazza San Marco with newspapers in 1976, he merely claimed to be creating "the poem of our time." Simultaneously with staging his mega-events, which are orchestrated by his resourceful wife, this obsessive artist submerges himself in the microcosm of the myriad miniature gestures of his fascinating picture boxes.

These picture boxes are constructions of a seemingly infinite number of tiny parts, some mass-produced and some made by the artist. In one sense, they descend from the large-scale panoramic murals made by nineteenth-century German artists, many of whom also worked in America. By and large these picture boxes depict transitory events and are shown to be in a state of constant flux. Each picture box includes a constantly evolving aspect, a "biokinetic" element, consisting of a small sealed container of anaerobic bacteria which continually changes its own organic palette. HA Schult has utilized "biokinetic" elements since a museum installation he created in Germany in 1969.

If Joseph Cornell's boxes can be said to be poetic, HA Schult's are closer to theatrical, even operatic. His expressive imagery always possesses an intensity, an urgency that demands to be heeded. Indeed, it is with our own

excesses that HA Schult boldly confronts us. He has made a biting commentary on the indulgent aspects of western society. He calls our attention to our own conspicuous consumption, obsessively returning to the metaphor of garbage, refuse dumps, and debris.

HA Schult's picture boxes, like his Actions, deal with the environment as he observes it. He has the ability to select out of his surroundings the quintessentially expressive elements. This same talent to recombine for expressive purposes is also manifested in HA Schult's personal surroundings—his home. In Cologne, then in New York, and currently in his own museum in Essen, West Germany, HA Schult has created a kind of picture box environment in which to live. His home must be seen to be believed. He has assembled a fantastic assortment of kitsch from contemporary society and makes us see the most ordinary objects as extraordinary. From the bright flower-patterned linoleum floors to the plastic flowers, billboards, and Coca-Cola umbrellas, we are coaxed to view the mundane as inventive artifice.

HA Schult's picture boxes give the viewer a slice of his vision of the world. Never static, this vision is multi-dimensional; it is often turbulent, even apocalyptic. These picture boxes are laden with images, episodes, and drama. The artist has described them as "film freezes without people." HA Schult utilizes many symbols, so that these works can be read on many levels.

His current picture boxes deal with contemporary issues while paying homage to the past. In *Romantic Street*, he contrasts the old world with the new, as a quaint old German street in picturesque Heidelberg confronts a dynamic panorama of New York City. Another picture box nostalgically features old Hollywood actors and actresses. *Paradise Island* shows the Bahamas' luxurious holiday playground where pink American Cadillacs frolic decadently in the winter sunshine. There are references to Robert Delaunay's Paris and to Eugene Delacroix's barricades, but HA Schult makes these themes contemporary, linking past and present, the nineteenth century with 1968 and 1988. At once, these captivating constructions amuse us, make us think, make us question.

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Front: Freedom, 1988, mixed media, 39 x 39 x 10 in.



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