



Pauline Rhodes, photodocumentation from *The Rossendale Project* 1989. Courtesy the artist.

Entries

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The diary embodies and articulates the tracing of a 'self' through time. It is a private place where fragments of a life are hoarded, where the quotidian rubs shoulders with the portentous, where the mundane is given free rein and the intimate full voice. As an alternative to both literature and history, the diary has been reclaimed and promoted by women as a site for the careful germination of a woman's 'voice'.¹ What follows is a fragmentary attempt to identify, in the contemporary visual art practices of women, the displaced traces of a diaristic form and impulse.

The diary is not-writing

A divine morning. At breakfast William wrote part of an ode.²

Compared to her brother's poetry, Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere journal (1800-03) does not carry much weight in the grand scheme of literary history. Her words inhabit the spaces around her brother's verse, signifying in her absence their status as not-poetry. *His* poetry is made to nestle comfortably amongst the quotidian details of the morning and of the hardly remarkable fact of his writing there, at breakfast. Yet *her* effacement cannot completely eradicate our sense of her pleasure in the fine morning.

It is a pleasure conceived not as a sentence but as a phrase. It is at once a statement of fact, a description, an exclamation, a sigh; its incompleteness a mark of its potential to signify, a measure of both a plenitude and a lack.

If one writes for one's own pleasure I don't know what it is that happens. I suppose the convention of writing is destroyed.³

The conventions of writing are indeed flouted, both from within: the very structure of the sentence is decomposed, rendered fragmentary; and from with-

out, for the diary fails to transform language into literature, refuses to impose anything more than the most cursory of narratives on events.

The Journal cannot achieve the status of the Book . . . it is only an Album.⁴

And what is an album but a quantity of interchangeable leaves, a scrap-book where all kinds of fragments can be collected, stored, arranged and re-arranged? It is, as Barthes would have it, a nascent Text outside the 'serene heaven of Logic', a literature in its immature, unconstituted form.⁵

If this is the case, then the diary poses an alternative: to the Logos, to History and to linear time. Its function is archival rather than archaeological. For in the archive information is randomly and obsessively acquired without reference to use or value, it is stored as a non-discursive texture of equivalence, rather than formulated hypothetically into a narrative about living, a history in its raw unformulated state.

If the diary is an interwoven texture of equivalence, an archive of sorts, its visual analogue might be the collage.

[Collage lifts] a certain number of elements from works, objects, pre-existing messages, and [integrates] them in a new creation in order to produce an original totality manifesting ruptures of diverse sorts.⁶

The collage fragment is polyvocal and unstable, remaining representational 'while breaking completely with the trompe-l'oeil illusionism of traditional realism'.⁷ As the diary is to Literature so collage is to Art. By rupturing perspectival space, collage undermines the hegemony of the visual, thus disrupting the unitary relation of author/viewer to work. Where the traditional author/artist has been conceived as phallic (Irigaray/Cixous),⁸ the collagist has been characterised as bisexual (Derrida),⁹

involved in the dual process of 'castration' (the severing of the fragment from its original source) and 'invagination' (the fragment folding-in on itself in its new location).

The collage is marked by seams and sutures. It is a complex lamina on which dismembered images combine and disintegrate. Think, then, of Merylyn Tweedie's resined text-pieces, where bits of recipe jostle fragments of fiction, where dislocated lines from theoretical texts dislodge handy hints from housekeeping manuals, where what image there is, is torn and decomposed. More like ambient noise than coherent speech, Tweedie's work eschews a 'writing' of self for a deferral to the myriad texts that make *her*. A collage is a commonplace book: a site for quotation and for borrowing, where the self not so much speaks but is spoken for, where the writer is no author.



Merylyn Tweedie, detail from *Happy Hour or Profile Tile or Acaculco*. Sheet of photocopies on fibreglass cloth on vinyl wallpaper, coated with epoxy resin, on floor tiles, 1680 x 1590 mm. Auckland City Art Gallery.

Writing is not-autobiography

Language is the history that gave me shape and hypochondria.¹⁰

Writing my Journal, I am, by status, doomed to simulation . . . What a paradox! By choosing the most 'direct', the most 'spontaneous' form of writing, I find myself to be the clumsiest of ham actors.¹¹

Writing in 1981, Leonard Bell seemed somewhat disappointed in Claire Fergusson's *Date Day*, a performance piece in which 365 slides of the artist in the clothes she wore each day for a year, were projected chronologically on to her naked body, to the accompaniment of her impromptu remarks about what she could recall of the events and feelings associated with each day. He found that:

The random diaristic excerpts, whether intentionally or not, were most often banal and unmemorable, revealing little about the personality and relationships of the person.¹²

Furthermore, he felt the 'preoccupation with dress and surfaces assumed an almost fetishistic dimension — even though the dress was ordinary.'¹³ Perhaps Bell was right to feel deflated by failing to locate an authentic self behind the patina of changing costumes Fergusson adopted, but today we are resigned to the fact that it is these very surfaces that define us.

When I rummage through my wardrobe in the morning I am not merely faced with a choice what to wear. I am faced with a choice of images: the difference between a smart suit and a pair of overalls . . . is not one of fabric and style, but one of identity.¹⁴

If identity is situated in codes of dressing, then 'self' can be invented by words chosen, by language used. The opacity of language renders problematic the diary's relation to autobiography, just as the coded nature of painting throws into doubt both the mimetic and self-expressive potentialities of the self-portrait.

I like to paint with the seasons . . . I usually work by blocking in my general ideas, then leaving the painting for some months, or years, and with notes, the ideas grow to a further stage.¹⁵

For a prolific and committed self-portraitist like Rita Angus then, the act of painting was inextricably tied to the evolution of her thinking; as Laurence Simmons suggests, she is *embodied* in the very 'process of

applying paint to canvas',¹⁶ no doubt in the same way that a writer is aware that she is *writing*, as much as of what it *is* she writes. But Rita Angus's self-portraits are coded in other ways. For one, she 'almost always relied on the montage of distinct subject assemblages to engender emotional response'.¹⁷ Here then, the viewer may find clues to her identity in both the attributes of the persona she adopts (goddess, bodhisattva, madonna) and in the objects with which she surrounds herself. These associational clusters are collage fragments re-presented within the paint surface itself. Thus 'she' resides not only in the texture of brushstrokes, not only in the physiognomy of the human figure before us, but also in the emblems and symbols that

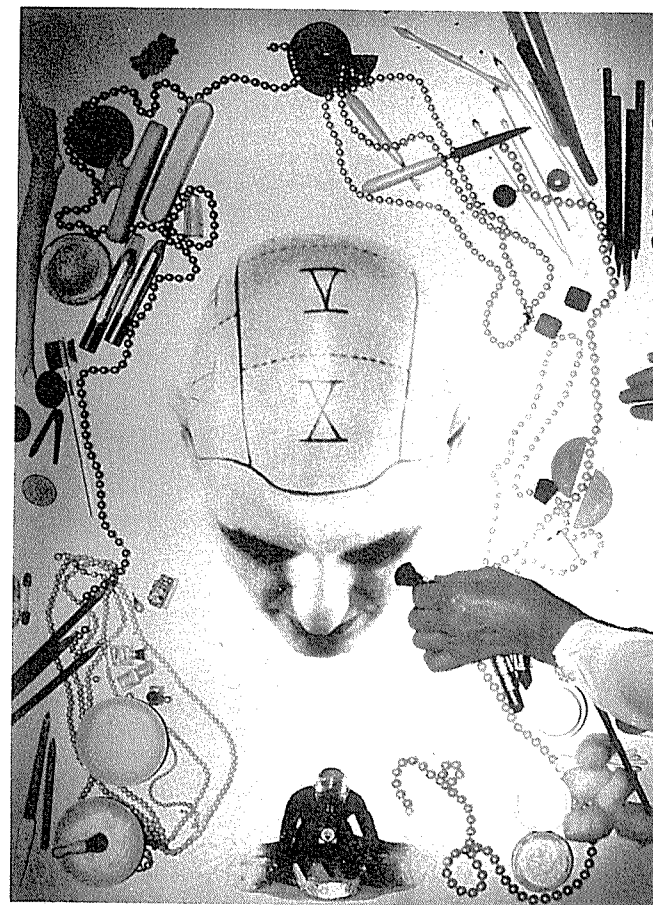
are but partially concealed as the things about her: at once costumed and in disguise.

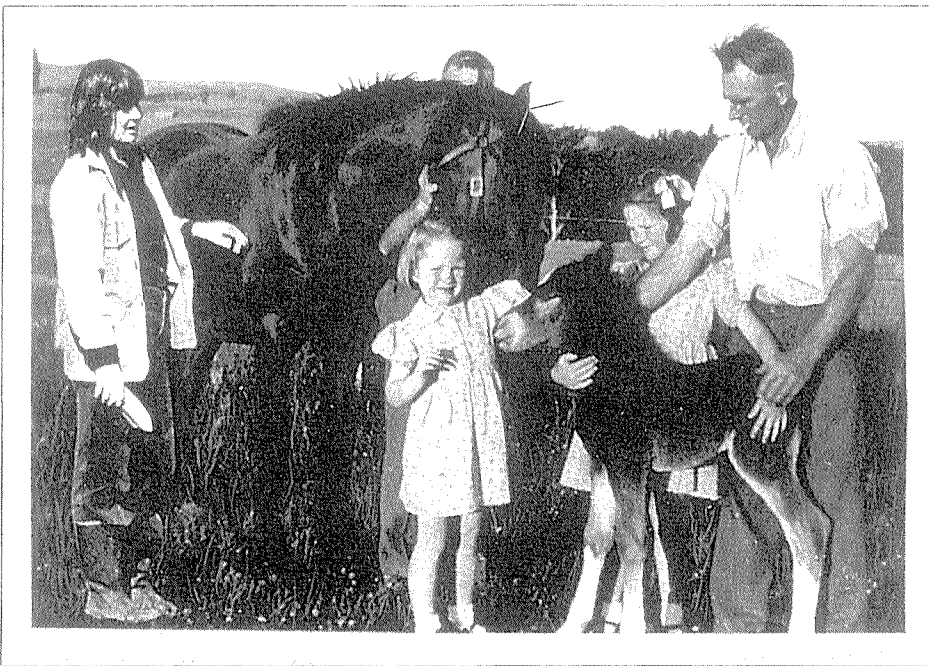
For another, and meta-discursively, her unconscious acknowledgement of image *as* image, of self as other, is played out through the projection of self as a mirror displacement reflected onto the surface of the painting.¹⁸

I, as subject and 'author' of these works, am located in *Tifereth* (Grace) the fifth *sefirah*. The understanding of the self's own constructed being, through the processes of metamorphosis, evanescence and substantiation, is symbolised by reflective surfaces . . . and photographic emulsion . . . These materials are pseudo-matter in the sense that their properties have more to do with light than substance. Like 'transparency' used in the highest *sefirah* (the Crown) they mock matter.¹⁹

Julia Morison's recognition of herself in the 'I' of the *Tifereth* is mirrored in *Quiddities I-X*, her recent self-portrait series, by her use of the photocollage as a medium

Julia Morison, *Quiddities V*, 1989. Cibatrans in lightbox, 920 x 660 x 175 mm. Courtesy the artist.





Grace Cochrane, *Christmas Morning 1950/1982*, from *Pages from an Album*, 1984. Hand-coloured photocollage, 400 x 530 mm. Courtesy the artist.

for the transformation of real objects into a polyvalent system of signs. These signs operate as ancient and contemporary symbols for the Kabbalist *Sefiroth*; and simultaneously for an investigation of the subject/self as both manipulator of, and coded by, the very system Morison articulates.

Implicated in the processes of naming, Morison carries with her a 'vademecum',²⁰ a manual to code and decode her experiences. Undoubtedly, it is significant that the hermetical knowledge to which she holds the key belongs to a pre-Christian era. For Morison is attracted to a polyglot body of knowledge that is largely tangential to the dominating discourse of Western metaphysics, yet which, at many junctures, provides that metaphysics' subtexts. Perhaps it is more than coincidental, then, that Rita Angus, too, was attracted to an historical period that was distant from her own, one which was largely suppressed in her time: the medieval.²¹ Rather than identify her preference as an unproblematic nostalgia for a 'bygone age',²² it could be seen to recall a time which was not only bound to the cycles of nature, deeply susceptible to the magical, but which was, most

importantly, iconoclastic in its attitude to the written remains of inherited knowledge. For:

The Middle Ages . . . performed a heedless destruction and a disordered preservation: it lost essential manuscripts and saved others that were quite negligible; it scratched away marvellous poems to write riddles and prayers in their place, it falsified sacred texts, interpolating other passages, and, in so doing, wrote 'its own' books.²³

In tracing itself, the self emerges, then, as a palimpsest, as a tracing of a tracing. The 'self' fills and is filled by not one book, but many. And she is expert at disguise.

Past imperfect / Present tense

As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known . . .²⁴

. . . the sequence through past, present and future is not necessarily linear . . .²⁵

She told me she had the idea of a little temple of art: a rotunda with spokes radiating and dividing areas to display different aspects of an individual artist's life.²⁶

'Women's time' is cyclical and monumental, non-linear and a-historical.²⁷ It is a dual recognition of the daily and the eternal, the repetitive both micro- and macroscopically intuited. It is, in essence, mundane.²⁸ The diary is a writing of this time, the snapshot its record and the album its home. Everyone's family albums look the same: the weddings, birthdays and Christmases that make it onto film, blurred photographs of half-forgotten relatives, shaky snaps of children and pets. Additively they reveal a private, familiar world in its fleetingly public moments, a world which, far from being coherently or conclusively portrayed, is marked instead by gaps and omissions, by absences and caesuras: the realm of memory not history.

If 'women generally write in order to tell their own family story',²⁹ then it is unremarkable that Grace Cochrane should use her own family albums to tell hers. What is significant, though, is the way in which she combines images, placing herself — as she is now — back into the photographs; photographs not only of her childhood and adolescence, but even of a time before she was born. In a process which inevitably confounds the linear progression of time, Cochrane maps the intricate traceries of her family history, exploring the dual notions of lineage and kinship, re-visiting the occasions and locations of her childhood.

. . . to scatter like dust, from day to day, the traces of a period, mixing all dimensions and proportions . . .³⁰

Photocollage, with its interpolative, combinatory capabilities, is an ideal tool for Cochrane's re-formulations. For she has in it a medium which is itself a version of the very processes she is intent on exploring. Furthermore, by retaining the album format she refuses any singular reading, deferring to the series in order to chart her own history, both through the images she presents and, in absentia, in the interstices between the serial collages she creates.

. . . the series promotes transmission rather than representation as such, it is . . . possible to cultivate void space (or silence), to reduce representation to traces and intimations.³¹

And as the series unfolds, the circle turns; leaves are added, the album rearranged.

Journal / Journey

Journal (n.)2. a book in which a daily record of happenings etc. is kept
(from L. diurnalis = daily, see: diurnal)

Journey (n.)1. a travelling from one place to another; trip or voyage 2.a. the distance travelled in a journey b. the time taken to make a journey
(from L. diurnum = day's portion, see: diurnal)

If the literal proximity of 'journal' to 'journey' renders writing a movement through time and space, then movement must surely be a writing of sorts, through space and time.

I have just re-read my year's diary & am much struck by the rapid, haphazard gallop at which it swings along . . . Still if it were not written rather faster than the fastest typewriting, if I stopped and took thought, it would never be written at all . . .³²

Daily runs

sculptural/scriptural

activity

the flow of —

idea/matter/body

of the sensuous

NOW³³

Rhythms emerge as the daily record unravels. Less a sequence than a routine, the journal is marked by repetition, unfolding through time not in any regular, inevitable progression, but by fits and starts. A single incident will take a page to describe, two days will pass and a sentence will suffice. On a particular day memories will be recorded, promises made.

From here each day seems like a little boat and all the days are swept and tilted back and forth across an immense and distant bay of blue, grey, green. We were like plump birds along the shore, caught by the mortal breaks. Dimension, longevity, colour and pleasure.³⁴

Word and sentence, page and volume, moment and duration, point and line. Such rhythms recall the play and replay of Pauline Rhodes's ongoing sculptural 'interventions' that briefly mark out a certain place in the landscape, on the land over which she runs,

through which she moves. Her luminous green rods and red marker-flags are pointers to her passage, reminders of her reactions to a particular site. They locate her and, momentarily, bring the landscape into line. But only for a moment. The photographs that document the work-in-situ, while remaining as the only record of her actions, serve as no more than *aides-de-memoire*, her writing is elsewhere and already complete.

The difference, then, between the photographs of the work and the work itself is the difference between history and memory, between the official record and the intimate journal. In sculpture the monument stands for History:

... a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place.³⁵

Immobile, vertical, the monument is a permanent fixture. In contrast, Rhodes's ephemeral markers are anti-monumental. Dispersed almost casually in their various locations, they lie, nestle, lean. Rather than declare their un-natural other-ness, they seem to gently prod the land into disclosing its secrets, to reveal the way in which nature is already inscribed by culture. And if the monument serves to fix time by immortalising it, her work, devolving as it does from her fascination with the cyclical processes of degeneration and renewal, growth and decay; draws on time: recycling materials, repeating operations, responding to the rhythms of locating, placing, removing.

What remains is a set of tracks. Not the single broken line of the traveller making progress on a map; but a double line, an exploration of reversibility, the trace of a movement on a strange still place in which everybody looks at elsewhere, and somebody looked at here.³⁶

Wot was here.³⁷

The journey is embarked on, the journal entry made; as it was yesterday, and will be, again, tomorrow ...

Notes

¹ The diary, as a literary form with visual potential, was reclaimed by women and feminist artists in the 1970s and early 1980s as a strategy which embodied the notion of the 'personal as political', that vital precept on which the reclamation and validation of women's experience in art was based. The work of a large number of artists is important here, amongst them: Carole

- 2 Shepherd, Claudia Pond-Eyley, Joanna Paul and many more. Dorothy Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journal* (1800 — 1803), quoted in Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and their Diaries*. London: Picador, 1984, p. 127.
- 3 Virginia Woolf, diary entry dated 7 November, 1928, quoted in Mallon, op. cit., p. 33.
- 4 Roland Barthes, 'Deliberation' in Susan Santag (ed.) *Barthes: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Fontana, 1983, p. 492.
- 5 Ibid, p. 495.
- 6 Andre Bazin quoted in Gregory Ulmer, 'The object of post-criticism' in Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 84.
- 7 Ibid, p. 84.
- 8 See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985, p. 8.
- 9 Ulmer, op. cit., p. 90.
- 10 Lyn Hejinian, *My Life*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1987, p. 47.
- 11 Barthes, op. cit., p. 493.
- 12 Leonard Bell, 'Self paint trait', *New Zealand Listener*, 5 September 1981, p. 36.
- 13 Ibid, pp. 36-7.
- 14 Judith Williamson quoted in Susan Butler, 'How do I look? Women before and behind the mirror', in *Staging the Self: Self-Portrait Photography 1840s-1980s*. London: National Portrait Gallery, 1987, p. 56.
- 15 Rita Angus, artist's statement in *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, n.3, 1947, p. 67.
- 16 Laurence Simmons, 'Tracing the self: the self-portraits of Rita Angus', *Antic* 4, October 1988, p. 49.
- 17 Ronald Brownson, 'Symbolism and the generation of meaning in Rita Angus's paintings', *Rita Angus*. Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982, p. 82.
- 18 I am indebted for this insight to Laurence Simmons' extended account of Lacan's 'mirror-stage' as it is enacted in Rita Angus's self-portraits, op. cit.
- 19 Julia Morison, 'My repugnance for antithesis is certain', *Julia Morison: Vademecum and Golem*. Wellington & Auckland: Louise Beale Gallery/Artis Gallery, 1987.
- 20 This term was used as the title of her 1986 work, *Vademecum*, which was her first major work to systematically address the sign-system of the *Sefiroth*.
- 21 Rita Angus's oft-quoted statement, 'New Zealand is, in essence, Medieval', can be found in *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, op. cit., p.67.
- 22 This view is exemplified by Anne Kirker in her essay, 'The later years 1959-1970', *Rita Angus*, op. cit., p. 61.
- 23 Umberto Eco, 'The return of the Middle Ages' in *Travels in Hyperreality*. London: Picador, 1987, p. 84.
- 24 Julia Kristeva, 'Women's time' in Toril Moi (ed.), *A Kristeva Reader*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 191.
- 25 Grace Cochrane, artist's statement in *Grace Cochrane: Remarking Time*. Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1988.
- 26 John Money on Rita Angus to Janet Paul, 'Biographical essay', *Rita Angus*, op. cit., p. 33.
- 27 Kristeva, op. cit., p. 191.
- 28 N.B. the Collins Dictionary definition of *mundane* (adj.): 1. everyday, ordinary or banal 2. relating to the world or worldly matters (from L. mundus = world).
- 29 Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillation between power and denial' in Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981, p. 166.
- 30 Barthes, op. cit., p. 481.
- 31 Ian Wedde, 'Resisting Foreclosure', catalogue essay for *Joanna Paul: Wanganui Works*. Wanganui: Sarjeant Gallery, 1989, p. 6.
- 32 Virginia Woolf, diary entry, 20 January 1919.
- 33 Pauline Rhodes, 'Daily runs', *Splash* 4, April 1986, p. 91.
- 34 Hejinian, op. cit., p. 27.

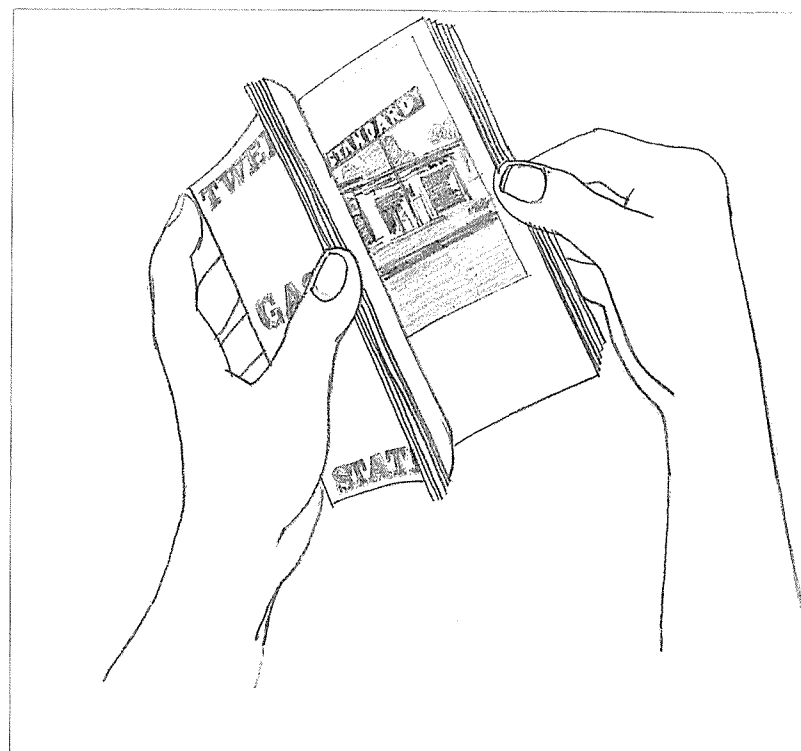
- 35 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the expanded field' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*, op. cit., p. 33.
- 36 Meaghan Morris, 'Two types of photography criticism located in relation to Lynn Silverman's series' in *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism Reading Postmodernism*. London: Verso, 1988, p. 149. Morris is here describing Australian artist Lyn Silverman's work which documents her journeys into the Australian outback by presenting a series of paired images: each one juxtaposing

a view of the horizon and a shot of the ground on which she stands. While Rhodes does not separate the 'prospect' from her placements in it, I nevertheless believe that Morris's remarks are evocatively applicable to Rhodes's work.

- 37 Pauline Rhodes, artist's notebook entry, 23 October 1984.

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Ed Ruscha, *Flipping* 1963. Pencil drawing, 355 x 432 mm. Courtesy Andrew Bogle.



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