

DECEMBER 1995

DEAR JUDI & RAY —

HERE IS A BLURB IN ADVANCE
OF AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE
INC'S BEGINNING.

PLEASE FILE IT IN AN ARBITRARY
SPOT IN THE INC'S ARCHIVES SO SOME
LUCKY RESEARCHER ON THE INC'S 25th
(OR 50th) (OR 100th) ANNIVERSARY CAN
"DISCOVER" IT.

THANK YOU.

AS EVER.

MERRY CHRISTMAS
& A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Robert Yates

THE ONCE & FUTURE INC.

Robert Clark Yates Interviews Himself
About the Birth of Hamilton Artists Inc.

1975 -- 1995

ry: *This is the year of Hamilton Artists Inc's twentieth anniversary. I have been asked to ask you to tell us about the Inc's genesis.*

RY: I was under the impression you wanted to talk to me about my art.

ry: *I'm sorry, Mr Yates. Maybe next time. I'm sure your personal activities would be of interest to a few people, but we are attempting here to gather facts of the birth of the Inc, a subject of interest to many Hamilton artists.*

RY: Oh.

ry: *Tell us how the Inc began.*

RY: My recollection of events that took place twenty years ago will be far more personal than talking about my art which I hope is more universal in nature than any history of an institution.

ry: *Well, personal stories bring history to life, don't you think? Let's start at the beginning. Tell us about the official opening in 1975.*

RY: To begin with, the opening was not the beginning. It was the birth, but the birth came after a period of intense labour, which followed at least nine months of active gestation after the initial planting of a seed. Even that was preceded by flirtation with the idea, and then courtship.

ry: *If you could, Mr Yates, would you please limit the imagery? We don't have much space and we would rather deal with official historical facts.*

RY: Sorry. But you should know that the opening was the continuation of a process already begun. It wasn't the beginning but a place where many tributaries joined to make a stream a river.

ry: *Just the facts please, sir.*

RY: The opening was a big party, what you would call a successful social happening. I designed the flyer announcing the event---an egg cracking open. Probably dignitaries were present but I can't recall who they were. The official history will immortalize them as the movers and shakers they're destined to be remembered as, but I don't remember them. What I do recall is a large group show with a surprisingly wide range of styles, subject matter and talent. I was pleased with my Canadian icon painting of a goalie called "Durhams Responsibility". At one point in the evening I remember noticing a young woman who moved beautifully, dancing with abandon, so there must have been music.

ry: *We have heard for years the cold fact that a group of twelve artists co-operatively founded the Inc in 1975. That doesn't really tell us very much. Perhaps you could tell us who they were and how and why they got together.*

RY: I could name maybe six or seven people I think were founders of the Inc, but I don't know for sure whether they were "official founders" or not. The Inc is now grown-up, on its own, in need of no parents. I was there when wild-oats were being sowed but I was pretty hard to find as soon as the responsibility of an entity which needed lots of attention and guidance came crying and kicking into the world. There were requests for alimony, but I had my own off-spring and art to tend to.

ry: *Please, Mr Yates...*

RY: Okay. But there is a difference between the founding of the Inc and the Inc itself. They have as much similarity as making love and raising kids.

ry: *Really, Mr Yates... Now, I understand you were a founder; so was Bryce Kanbara...*

RY: I don't know for sure whether Bryce was an "official founder" or not, but it is my understanding that I was not.

ry: *Oh? Many people I've talked to are under the impression that you were a founding member of the Inc, and in some of your published writings you make that claim yourself. What's the story?*

RY: I have been actively involved in the Inc very little of the twenty years it has been going. My involvement ebbs and flows between long stretches of complete abstinence and short periods of intense commitment. I don't like the official meetings, proper procedures, committees, policies and rules the Inc seems to thrive on. My lack of leadership is exceeded only by my inability to follow. I can't really be closely associated with this or any other organization.

ry: *You are not a founder of the Inc... ?*

RY: I'm sorry. You may be interviewing the wrong person. I'll tell you a story anyway. It should make it clear that you probably are interviewing the wrong person.

At the time of the big NOW show of contemporary Hamilton artists at the old Library building---it was 1986, over ten years after the founding of the Inc---there was a simultaneous retrospective show of historic Hamilton artists across the street at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Late one night Bryce Kanbara and I were up on ladders writing with chalk on the walls of the Gallery, doing the installation for that show...

ry: *"Climbing the Cold White Peaks!" I remember that exhibition. It looked great.*

RY: Yes. It's a good example of Bryce's curatorial inventiveness and I think it really worked. It was based on Stuart McCuaig's history, an Inc-sponsored book which also came out at that time. Anyway, an article by me had just appeared in a Hamilton magazine as part of a co-ordinated effort of many artists on all fronts in an ambitious awareness-raising for the Hamilton art scene during those heady days. The by-line said I was a founding member of the Inc. In the course of whatever we were talking about, Bryce said to me, "How come you keep saying you're one of the founding members of the Inc? You weren't one of the founders." This surprised me and left me dumbfounded. I had come through the preceding decade with an apparently false assumption that I was a founder, since I was there at the beginning---from the initial conception, as was Bryce---arranging with real estate people to see prospective gallery space, trying to bring together as many local artists as we could, feeling a direction by meeting with artists and various established organizational representatives---Bill

Powell of the Ebony Knight, Greg Curnoe of CAR, Glenn Cumming of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, going to Saint Catharines to see what the Niagara artists were doing---not to mention long talks with Bryce, Mel Shimoda and Paul Dymont, drinking and dreaming of how we could get an art scene happening... I had thought the Inc grew out of that (and I'm sure it did), so I innocently thought I was one of the founders.

ry: And Bryce's story is different?

RY: I'm reminded of another story: I once heard Barker Fairley interviewed on CBC Radio. He was a friend of the Group of Seven and once went on a sketching trip down the Moon River with A.Y. Jackson. One night they saw a magnificent tree get struck by lightning. Years later Fairley heard Jackson giving a public talk on the early days. A pivotal anecdote was his vivid memory of the tree and the lightening. But he said his companion was Lismer or someone else. Fairley was hurt that he wasn't remembered. He had thought the memory of that event was something very special the two of them shared. But even this anecdote may be inaccurate if you check my memory against the transcripts of that particular radio program. We remember things differently and put different emphasis on them. I would be curious to hear Bryce's recollection for public consumption of the pre-Inc days and the Inc's opening.

ry: Would it differ from the official version?

RY: Until the night of the writing on the walls I was unaware there even was an "official" Inc history. We have a definition problem here. I don't know what a founding member is.

ry: Aw. Feeling left out, are we? Are you afraid history is going to forget you? There, there.

RY: Thank you. It is nice to be understood.

ry: Well, if it is any comfort to you, Tom Thomson was not a member of the Group of Seven either. Maybe you are like Tom Thomson.

RY: You are too kind.

ry: Whether you were an official member of the group or not, you can still talk of the early days since at least you were there...

RY: All I have to offer are first-hand anecdotes. I know

nothing of any "official history". The gallery's "official" raison d'etre is probably something you would write on an application form for a government grant rather than what we really felt when we got together for a few beers after working alone pursuing our own individual art.

ry: Alright, alright. This is like pulling teeth. Tell us the unofficial story of the early days, the Inc's pre-history and founding. I don't care if it's gossip. That may spice things up a bit. Was there any conflict between any of the personalities involved?

RY: No, nothing worth mentioning. Things seemed to develop pretty smoothly.

ry: I think you're exercising selective memory. In fact, your account is less helpful than the "official history". Everyone knows that when you get a group of people together there will be differences of opinion as to the purpose of your getting together. Different agendas develop. Strategies unfold to support the agendas. There is often conflict. I think we can assume with certainty that there were conflicts and differences of opinion...

RY: Okay, you're right. There were conflicts. But not profound ones. I must say here that Bryce nobly took most of the initiative and responsibility for the Co-op and I think he was a founder no matter what the official record says. So were Paul Dymont and Mel Shimoda. The gathering of artists began with the four of us in my kitchen or at Mel's parents' house. We gradually rounded up the others---Sam Robinson and Bob Mason, then Frank Zavarella, Wayne Allen, Jim and Peggy Spencely, Cindy Hill, Marie Laywine to name a few. We met at Sam and Kate's, at the Westdale Library, at Cindy Hill's coach house studio. But there were other artists I can't remember off-hand, and if all this is important, so were they. Most of the artists were young, in their twenties. Bob Mason, probably in his late thirties, was the old boy. I tried to interest older artists like Bill Kidston but he had been a hermit-like painter for nearly a quarter of a century and didn't want to get involved. He was too independent and understood too well the dynamics of group tyranny.

ry: Let's hear about the conflicts, the real juicy stuff. The present active members should know that conflicts have been there from Day One.

RY: Well, my preference for the Inc location was in Dundas because the Valley School of Art was there, it was in the west end near Mac art students, and it was my hometown. I

had my eye on the old Dundas Star building near the Post Office. It would have been a great space and location. It was free to let but the rent was too high. Fortunately the Co-op settled at Bryce's choice on James Street North. I am now convinced James Street was the best location, not isolated from common day-to-day street life but right in the midst of things. It had been a Chinese laundry and we had to convert it to gallery space, repair and paint the walls, etc. I remember scraping the painted Chinese sign off the window with a putty knife. Bryce was angry with me because he thought we could have used the Chinese characters to demark our gallery. I don't know. Again, he may have been right.

Perhaps because of the mounting tension of our dream of a gallery actually coming to fruition, everything I did or said seemed to bug Bryce in those days. Doing physical work like pulling prints, repairing walls or hanging exhibitions, Bryce and I worked very well together, but policy making around formal conference tables was another story. I was probably very irritating because of my anarchistic ideas of what a co-operative is. It seems most people don't share my notions of co-operation. I think it means everybody operates on their own as long as they don't get in the others' way. That is, when many lone people successfully *operate*, they *co-operate*. They work toward the same goal but not necessarily all toeing the line determined by the group. You've probably noticed that most people who want you to co-operate really want you to do what *they* want to do, not what *you* want to do. To me, that's not real co-operation. It is operation by one person and assistance from the others. Is that clear?

ry: *I think you are just justifying the fact you are hard to get along with.*

RY: Well, I can't argue with you on that point. You're probably right.

ry: *Go on. Tell us more.*

RY: Do you remember the brick wall near the front window at the old Inc? The wall nobody liked. I was responsible for that. I think I drove a nail into that wall and a piece of plaster the size of a grand piano dropped to the floor. That wall had cleverly been plastered about an eighth of an inch out from the bricks behind it, so I easily removed the plaster veneer and left the brick. I liked the look of it. Again, Bryce was really pissed off that I would do such a thing without consultation. I'm no fan of white walls. I prefer paintings in a living environment over galleries and I often think I would like to wallpaper a gallery before hanging my paintings. I preferred, in most cases, to see my

stuff hanging on the brick wall rather than the white wall.

ry: Okay, we're digressing here, Mr Yates. We're not really interested in your personal aesthetic judgements. We want historical anecdotes of the Hamilton art scene.

RY: Not long after the Co-op first opened, Paul Dymont and myself were gallery-sitting, lounging on the sofa Dyme had donated, the Co-op's only piece of furniture. There hadn't been even one visitor all day. We were talked out and to ward off boredom we started to sing. Our voices filled the gallery in the grand manner of opera singers. We improvised a lengthy opera, really hamming it up, moving all over the gallery with arm gestures and striking poses. Then we became aware of a crowd of people at the window and door, watching us.

ry: What are you talking about?

RY: I'm telling you one of the most memorable and artistic things that ever occurred at the Inc.

ry: Let's return to the matter at hand. How did you settle on the name of the gallery?

RY: Bryce wanted to call it "Fay Wray", the name of the Hollywood star who acted in the movie King Kong. It was a pun---it also meant something in Japanese; I can't remember what. I, for one, couldn't make the connection between Fay Wray and a Hamilton art gallery. I guess the ten founders, whoever they are, couldn't either because the place got called Hamilton Artists' Co-op. It was Bob Mason who painted those words on the front window of the place. The Co-op became the Inc later.

ry: I get the distinct feeling you want to add that the name changed from the Co-op because it stopped being what you call co-operative.

RY: Acts of definition are acts of war. What things get called has always been an Inc problem.

ry: Like who the founding members were?

RY: That's no problem. I was thinking of the Inc publication. The Inc is the type of organization that has to be founded anew each year or so anyway. Jewell Foster wasn't there at the beginning but she is a key person in the Inc's presence and survival. The day Jewell joined the Inc was a far more important date in Inc history than the day those ten

people declared themselves founders of the Inc.

RY: *Twelve.*

RY: *Pardon.*

ry: *There were twelve founders.*

RY: *Oh. Anyway, it's not that important. Bryce, Paul Dymont, Jewell Foster, Sam Robinson, Donna Ibing, Joan Urquhart, Ray Cinovskis, Doug Carter, Bob Mason, Wayne Allen, Brian Kelly, Sharon Monte, Teri Freeman, Linda Duvall, Ted Haines, Tina Sheed, Brian Johnstone, David Avon, Pat Kozowyk, Gord White, Vitas Benusius, Jocelyn Salem, Dave Martin, Owen Ford, all the Kinsellas, Cees and Annerie Van Gemerden, Jane Gordon, Jim Riley, Anne Milne, Peter Karuna, Reinhard Reitzenstein, Judi Burgess, Paul Ropel-Morski, Gary Spearin, Andrew Hunter, Dawn Beatty, Mary Ebos and many others over the years have all made an imprint on the Inc. These are just a few names that come to me but there are many others. Other people would have other names they think of when they think of the Inc.*

ry: *However it began, Hamilton Artists Inc is now well-established, respected not just locally but on the national scene as well...*

RY: *But no thanks to me, I'm afraid. At one of the early meetings prior to the opening of the Inc, someone wanted to elect officials and start taking minutes of our meetings. What? I thought. Minutes? We were a gang of friends and artists who had come together to make something happen and I opposed any sort of hierarchy or the idea of official records and elected positions and rules. As it turned out, it seems I was wrong. My attitude to this project was nomadic with the emphasis on the immediate. I figured we would be setting up camp for a while before moving on, leaving no trace of having been there. Bryce, to his credit, was building a foundation for a permanent habitation. The Inc would not have lasted beyond the opening members' show if it followed my non-existent game plan. But I have little appreciation for bureaucracies and official happenings. They'll get by and thrive without my encouragement. My instincts say rebel against the established and respectable, which tend more to the impersonal and rule-bound the more established and respectable they get.*

RY: *You really don't know the official founding members of the Inc?*

RY: All I know is that I was not present when a certain group of people apparently declared themselves "official founding members" of the Co-op, as it was known in those days. However, although I can't remember the exact date, I think I remember precisely what night it was. Before one of the many meetings we had, Mel Shimoda, Bryce's cousin, phoned me and said that he and Bryce thought it would be best if I wasn't at the meeting that night---I suppose because they thought or knew I was a shit disturber and they had an agenda they didn't want disturbed. I was offended. I didn't go to that meeting. It is my guess that in a frenzy of minute-taking officialdom someone was inspired to suggest that the people who happened to be present at that particular meeting should thereafter be known as the official founders of the artists' organization we were finally getting off the ground. I never knew. I was never officially introduced to or aware of the founders. I'm sure I would have protested.

So, to set the record straight as far as I understand it, I am not one of the official founding members of the Inc. I'm not interested in the records so I have no idea who *is*, officially. It didn't take the Inc long to outgrow its founders and become an entity unto itself.

ry: Tell us about the events leading up to the founding of the Inc, the initial impulses to get artists together to start a gallery.

RY: This, again, is personal, not official.

ry: I expect nothing else from you, Mr Yates.

RY: Bryce Kanbara and I met in the late 60's at McMaster where we were students in Fine Arts. We had an instantaneous rapport because we were both aspiring artists and each could see in the other that he was not alone. Geo Wallace's print-making course offered etching every second year. On an off year Bryce and I decided we needed to learn to etch immediately. As impatient young artists we had our own unarticulated agenda. We were full of beans so we cut out the middle-men and went straight to Wallace's residence in Dundas and asked him if he would teach us etching. As a professional professor he could have said, "Sign up for my next course", but he didn't. He seemed pleased and consented to our request. This beautiful man on his own time gave us a free, off-the-record, non-credit course in etching. Armed with this knowledge, Bryce and I bought our own paper, ink and zinc plates then, without permission, we moved into the McMaster print room, claiming the unused room for a personal studio, stayed after hours, many times all night etching and drawing till the morning sun was pouring in the windows.

Often we put in twelve or fourteen hour work days. Eventually we were caught, chastized and kicked out by the authorities, but it was a great learning experience. I'm sure we appeared to be a couple of sloppy undisciplined and irreverent hippies, but we were learning to be working artists. Becoming an artist is a transformation you feel possessing you like love. You don't need official recognition or diplomas for things like that.

ry: This is all very well but does it have anything to do with the founding of the Inc?

RY: There was no discernable art scene in Hamilton at that time and even though there were just two of us, we were making an artistic community, as many artists have done and as artists will always do. I tend to think of this as the first step in the Inc's coming to be. I can't separate these things. They're all part of the same movement.

There were other seminal events. One morning another artist, Paul Dymont, dragged Bryce and me and samples of our work to the Ten Mile House Gallery. The gallery is no longer there. It was up old York Street beyond Campbell's coffee house which is also no longer there. This was before the street widening purge. We wanted to participate in a living art scene in Hamilton, to work and show our work. The impulse to get together with other artists was there. We didn't get a show, but if we couldn't exhibit in an established gallery, we knew we would have to do it on our own. Then a friend of mine asked us to mount an art exhibition in conjunction with an OPIRG environmental conference at McMaster University. This was our first successful gathering of artists in a co-operative public endeavour. There were juried art shows around, like the CKOC annual show, and there were commercial galleries, but we put together an exhibition entirely determined, curated and hung by artists--- *a co-operative*. Sam Robinson and Bob Mason were among the participants.

These were a couple of the many necessary steps leading up to what was later known as "the founding of the Inc". At the time it began, the Inc was just one more thing we were doing, another link in a chain we had already begun.

ry: You had no historic sense of what you were doing, the importance of that particular link?

RY: I still don't. All you're getting from me is personal history. The "official founding" of the Inc was no more important than these other things, and to me it is inseparable from them. If the Inc as a gallery and an organization was to close tomorrow, the people would still be

here. I see no reason why the movement and activities of artists couldn't continue with far less formal structure.

ry: *I understand the national artists' movement CAR had a part to play.*

RY: Yes. A decisive event that helped congeal our resolve to get together with other artists to make a Hamilton art scene was Greg Curnoe's coming to Hamilton to promote Canadian Artists Representation. He was president of CAR at the time. He met Sam Robinson, Bryce Kanbara and myself in the Westdale Library where we talked business then retired to a pub for a few beers. After that we went for coffee and talked till the wee hours. This was shortly before the Inc's opening. I remember Curnoe asked me about my work. He said I had better be careful that I didn't drift into Mannerism--- advice from an established "famous" artist I didn't understand then, and don't understand now, but I've always remembered it. Curnoe was killed while riding his bicycle a few years ago. That was a sad day for the arts in Canada.

ry: *CAR was responsible for public galleries paying rental fees to artists?*

RY: Yes. It is easy to forget that what we take for granted now wasn't always so. In the mid-70's the Hamilton Art Gallery and the McMaster Gallery did not pay fees to artists for showing. The idea of paying artists was shocking to the officials of the art world in those days. The feeling even among artists was, why should public galleries pay artists? The honour of showing was supposed to be payment enough. Money in the arts is for directors and curators, security guards and insurance brokers, arts council officers, jurors of juried shows, reviewers, critics, writers and printers of catalogues, framers, retailers of art materials... But artists? They don't need money! That would ruin some absurd romantic precedent.

Curnoe conscripted Sam Robinson, Bryce Kanbara and me into CAR. He encouraged local lobbying in a national campaign for instituting artists' fees for shows in public galleries and convinced us that artists are workers who do valuable work and should be paid. This coincided with our efforts to find a focal point for the visual arts scene in Hamilton at that time.

I remember going to a big CAR conference at the Ontario College of Art with Sam and Bryce. We had begun meeting with other Hamilton artists at that time because when the conference subdivided into smaller workshops we agreed we should take notes to share information with our fellow Hamilton artists. Prior to the Hamilton Artists Inc opening,

much of the agenda at our artists' meetings was CAR-inspired.

RY: Very interesting, but it's getting late. Let's wind things up. Have you any final words?

RY: Lip service is paid to the importance of art but artists still find it hard to make a living. The thrust of arts support should be towards individual lone working artists rather than institutions, because art is important and artists make art, not committees. And the support preferably should be payment for services rather than grants. Court Houses, parks, schools, arenas, bridges, street corners---all need paintings, murals or sculptures. "Art" is too often narrowly associated with galleries and juried exhibitions in public places. The arbitrariness of juried shows is frustrating. I had been a prize winner in one show, then with work of similar quality I was rejected from even participating in another show. I thought the ordeals artists were forced to go through were ridiculous and wanted to share my feelings with fellow artists. During one of the Members' Shows at the Inc it occurred to me that every participant was making a worthy contribution to our living culture and that they all deserved special recognition. I made personalized first prize ribbons for every participant in the show. I wanted them to be able to state truthfully on their CV's and applications for arts grants that they had been a first prize winner in a large and important art exhibition. This was not a joke. If this is what impresses judges, we could provide it. I hate the snobbery, elitism and competition that permeates the art world.

Artists who get together to participate in a co-operative effort, as the Inc is, should not be passing aesthetic judgement on each other. I can cite many examples of events around the Inc where artists fell into abuse of fellow artists in the name of "good taste". Society in general does this. Artists should not do it to each other. For example, I was once personally called by the Inc to see if I would participate in an art exchange with a gallery in another city. Sure I would, so I was asked to prepare a statement and slides of my work, which I did. Later I discovered the show was a selection of "the best" and I had been rejected. Artists passing judgements of taste on each other should not occur under the auspices of the collective Inc where all members should be equal. We're all too full of prejudices to be free from unfair discrimination. Members should participate in group shows and have solo shows once in a while. We can then become familiar with each other's work. Those members with curatorial ambitions can familiarize themselves with what they like, organize shows by invitation and offend no one. But no member should be asked to waste

his or her time by submitting work that runs the chance of being rejected by fellow artists. My democratic intuition tells me that all Inc members (when they feel they are ready, or after they have participated in a certain number of group shows) should be entitled to a solo show at the Inc without being subject to the questionable taste of a selection committee.

A few years ago the Inc put out a call for artists to submit slides to be considered for Art Bank. The disturbing thing here was that the organizers were going to choose "the best" to narrow things down and then make a presentation to Art Bank. It is not the job of artists to act as gatekeepers and censors. We *must* have better things to do.

Once I was asked if I would volunteer to do a design for something and I agreed. Then I was told, by the way, another artist had also agreed to do it and they would use the design they liked best. I then refused to do it. Getting volunteers to compete against each other is a waste of time and energy. I don't like this way of doing things. It's bad manners. Artists should smarten up, treat each other as though their time is equally valuable and boycott activities that treat anyone like riff-raff---especially juried shows that charge entrance fees, even to rejected artists.

ry: *Are you pleased with the Inc's development?*

RY: One hot summer day when the humidity was unbearable I dropped by the Inc to see the latest exhibition. It was like an oven in there. Joan was melting in front of the Inc's brand new computer. The Board in its wisdom had decided to buy a computer instead of air-conditioning. Something seemed wrong with the priorities. "The hell with the viewing public, we've got a growing bureaucracy to run," they seemed to be saying.

ry: *You're not pleased.*

RY: Things happen that I don't understand.

ry: *How about the exhibitions?*

RY: Doug Carter and I were talking over coffee a while ago and the Inc was mentioned. He suggested that the shows seem to follow pretty closely the aesthetic considered to be the new mainstream by certain arts magazines. The Inc cannot be said to be on the cutting edge, not that it matters. It's an established institution often showing imported fashions and curatorial trends dictated from elsewhere. We both felt pretty far from the mainstream, unaware of the cutting edge,

and tended to ignore them or rebel if they got in the way.

The Inc could be abdicating its responsibility to local artists. It seems to me the rightful heirs to the spirit behind the founding of the Inc are Denise Lisson and Jim Mullin with their Hammer Gallery. The focus there is on local artists and a sense of community. And Bryce while curator at Burlington was doing a job that should have been done even more intensely by the Inc. It's as though we forget why the Inc was started.

ry: Why do you think the Inc was started?

RY: For me, it was simple. I wanted a place to exhibit. To participate in group shows regularly, maybe 3 or 4 times a year, as a spur to work. To have a solo show maybe every 2 or 3 years. To participate in a community of like-minded people who think art and making art are important. But alas, showing was far more sparse than that.

I think I had the Co-op's first solo show---which also has the dubious distinction of being the first Inc event to be raided by the police. My father, bless his soul, was drinking a beer out front on the sidewalk... I don't think he was singing. Son of a gun, eh? It's good to know where you come from.

My second solo show at the Inc was in 1984. Early in '93 I went to apply for a show in '94. I was by now resigned to having a solo show at the Inc every 10 years. It didn't seem excessive. But '94 was all booked up. This means the Inc is now booked solid two years in advance! My solo shows were good luck charms guaranteeing the Inc's survival for the following decade. It worked for the first decade, and for the second---but if I couldn't get a show in '94, would the Inc survive another decade? Has the time come again for artists having difficulty showing their work to get together to start a co-operative gallery?

Open group shows of local artists have been reduced to the Annual Members' Show. Even these have come to have restrictions. Limited to active members! Must adhere to a dictated theme! I understand the whole year of '96 Inc programming has been thematically shackled in complete disregard of the fact that free working artists have their own agendas. It's a sad day if the Inc operates primarily for grant money rather than for artists and their art. Obsessed with curatorial problems, the Inc is liable to make itself irrelevant---art and the making of art are what's important here. Our job is to see things for what they are, not to herd them into opaque little reproducible boxes and lock the lids with myopic definitions.

ry: Come off it, Yates! You can't expect to have a say in

the matter. You're not even a member of the Inc. Your membership lapsed years ago.

RY: You're right, I'm sorry to say.

ry: Why is this? Is it some kind of protest? Are you trying to tell us something?

RY: I always looked forward to the Annual Members' Show. When I couldn't participate one year because I wasn't giving the Inc enough of my time, my main reason for being a member, which was to show my work, was gone. I have other time-consuming obligations: family, friends, my art...

ry: As a representative of the past, have you any advice for the future Inc?

RY: Serve local artists even at the expense of offending the taste-makers who insist on presenting the latest national or international vogues in style or content. Keep the democratic grass roots alive and treat people equally. Artists should keep in touch with each other and not worry too much if an institutional organizational bureaucracy seems wobbly. As long as artists are producing and showing and talking, Hamilton's art scene will be alive and healthy and well.