

## BUSTER CLEVELAND (1943-1998)

Buster Cleveland's most widely seen artworks were those using covers of Artforum magazine that he produced beginning in the late 1980's. Photographic self portraits, portraits of friends, logos from cigarette packs, and an assortment of other kitsch and popular imagery were collaged onto the magazine covers, many of which were preserved in poured plastic after he made laser prints of the collages, reducing them to postcard size and distributing them through the mail by subscription. The Artforum project was for the most part developed side-by-side with other poured plastic pieces, several of which are presented in this exhibition.

Buster Cleveland, born James Trenholm in Chicago in 1943, had studied at the Chicago Art Institute and the San Francisco Art Institute after serving in the Coast Guard. His interest at that time, according to his son Zach, was painting brightly colored geometric abstractions. Learning of the Russian Constructivists, Futurists, and Dadaists he turned his interest toward collage, a medium more suited to his nomadic life traveling up and down the California coast and Mexico. He'd become Buster Cleveland by the time he'd arrived in Northern California in the '70's, where he settled during the first half of that decade, and became involved with the Mendocino Area Dadaists (M.A.D) and the Bay Area Dadaists (B.A.D.), California organizations of artists whose intent was to recreate the ephemeral works of early European Dadaist like Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters. It was also at this time he began his activities with mail art, a medium pioneered by his friend Ray Johnson.

In the latter part of the 1970's, Cleveland moved to New York City and lived bi-coastally through the early 80's. During winter he would live in California spending time with his kids and co-organizing two international Dada conferences: Inter-Dada 80 and Inter-Dada 84. By springtime he would arrive back in New York and could be found selling his artworks out of a portfolio in and around the SoHo district of lower Manhattan, his regular office situated on the bench height skirt running along the outside of a building on the north west corner of Spring Street at West Broadway. The portfolio contained meticulously made dadaist collages that he produced on postcards, and letter sheets of graph paper that were color xeroxed and editioned. Most popular in his portfolio were xeroxed collages copied onto gummed paper and perforated to create sheets of postage stamps that were sold as full sheets or used in addition to postage for his mail art projects.

The 1970's proved to be a very fertile period for Cleveland having him develop many of his friendships with artists who were recognized as important within the margins of the art world – John Evans, May Wilson, Ray Johnson, and Al Hansen amongst them. Although the artists who made up this milieu were not in the mainstream, they were very much talked about in the New York art world, as is still the case today.

It was not until the following decade that Cleveland would begin experimenting with mounting cut out elements of his collages onto foamcore to create a pop-up effect on the surface of his collages, and frame them behind glass. Over time, he began to remove the glass and fill in the frame with poured plastic into which he embedded automobile hood ornaments and other consumer items. I'd often wondered if Cleveland hadn't used objects from the bottle sculptures given him by John Evans who collected an assortment of colorful objects, beads, and metal parts that he filled glass bottles with and gave to friends. Cleveland's late poured plastic works, many never exhibited, continued until his untimely death in 1998, and are considered to be amongst his most important works.



*Coke*, c. 1988  
Mixed media under poured plastic  
17½ x 17½ inches

*Sur Rodney (Sur)*  
Independent curator and archivist