

General Idea

Editions 1967 - 1995

Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo



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The artistic collective known as General Idea and consisting of AA Bronson (Vancouver, Canada, 1946), Felix Partz (Winnipeg, Canada, 1945) and Jorge Zontal (Parma, Italy, 1944) came together in Toronto, Canada, in 1969 and concluded its activity in 1994, when two of its members (Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal) died of AIDS.

General Idea explored the mechanisms and strategies of the culture industry making use of elements and resources of popular culture and mass media. They did so using various artistic formats - performance, video art, photography, publications, serial work-, abandoning the model of the single artist and giving up their individual identity to the anonymity of a collective identity that challenged the notions of authorship and copyright on which the market machinery of art is based.

Inspired by contemporary trends of thinking, such as Feminist movements or the gay liberation fronts, and the writings of such as Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Marshall McLuhan, their first pieces centred around the creation of an alternative sexual identity and the definition of a participative art by which they broke through the barriers traditionally separating artists and audience. Their work shows the influence of the decentralised, multimedia proposals of Fluxus, and the intellectualised reworking of media products developed out of Andy Warhol's or Joseph Beuys' thesis that everyone is a potential artist.

General Idea centred much of their work on the design and manufacture of serial articles for mass consumption or *multiples*, such as postcards, visiting cards, wallpapers, helium balloons or TV dinner plates, and also various publications. General Idea's editions are not just the reproduction of a commercial product in which the secondary functions are more important than the object itself. The multiples are a set of works showing the breadth of the concepts developed by the collective: their reflection on questions such as the construction of sexual identity; the theatrical tactics of spreading artistic originality and genius; the "viral" potential of the image in the information society; the role of the media; the conversion of artistic production into speculative goods; critical analysis of the commerce of art; the influence of pharmacology on people's everyday lives; or the relations between art, design and architecture. They did all of this through irony and an aesthetics of excess which, by accumulating elements, images and symbols, analysed the artificial nature and contextual dependence of artistic production.

With their production of *multiples*, General Idea moved consciously away from the auratic idea of artistic creation, unmasking the fetishist cult of the object and the notion of copyright that still prevails throughout the world of art. Similarly, these low-cost objects allowed them to explore the social, cultural and economic mechanisms



Baby Makes 3, 1982

that convert works of art into consumer goods. Their ironic pretension to become "famous" artists led them to celebrate *The 1971 Miss General Pageant*, an event that reproduced the glamour of the television spectacles and shows of the time, with no lack of red carpets, limousines, invitations, hand programmes, etc., all designed by the artists. The concept was continued in *Miss General Idea Pavilion* (1968-1984). In the early 1980's they produced deliberately kitsch works of corrosive humour, such as *Mondo Cane Kama Sutra*, *Baby Makes 3* or *P is For Poodle*.

The most outstanding of General Idea's publications was the magazine *FILE*, of which 29 numbers were published up to 1989, with the collaboration of some of the most radical and heterodox figures on the international artistic scene of recent years, ranging from collectives such as Art Language to writers like William Burroughs, as well as groups such as the Talking Heads or The Residents. Both the name and the design of the publication were inspired by *LIFE* magazine,

whose meaning was changed by switching the consonants round. This formal and conceptual transformation of another object to give it new connotations can be found in many of General Idea's pieces. The clearest example is their readymade of the piece by Robert Indiana titled *LOVE* (1966), which they copied, substituting the word AIDS: this AIDS logo formed part of their projects of urban intervention. Similarly, proposals like *Infecte@ted Pharmacie* reproduce and alter modernist icons of twentieth century art to criticize the restrictive nature of legislation on copyright and author's rights.

The success of *FILE* led them to set up *Art Metropole*, a hybrid between a specialised shop for artists, a publishing house and a museum, which was the first Canadian institution specifically designed as an archive and distribution agency for artists' publications and collections as well as publishing magazines and fanzines.

Many museums in Canada, USA and Europe have staged retrospectives of their work and they took part in prestigious international events such as the Venice Biennale and the Kassel Documenta.

AIDS, 1987



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30 January - 1 April 07

The exhibition, accompanied by the book entitled *General Idea Editions 1967-1995*, published by the Blackwood gallery, UTM, Toronto, Canada; also includes the installations *Magi@ Bullet*, *Magi@ Carpet* and *Fin de siècle*.

The exhibition has been travelling since 2003, recently visiting the Kunstverein Munich, Germany; the Kunst-Werke ICA, Berlin, Germany, and the Kunsthalle Zurich, Switzerland.

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Monasterio de la Cartuja de Santa María de las Cuevas
Avda. Américo Vespucio nº 2
Isla de la Cartuja - 41092 SEVILLA

Tel. +34 955 037 070

Fax +34 955 037 052

educ.caac@juntadeandalucia.es

www.caac.es

Timetable

1 October - 31 March

Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 20 h.

Saturday: 11 - 20 h.

Sunday: 10 - 15 h.

Monday: **Cerrado**

Holidays: Consult with Centre.

Access

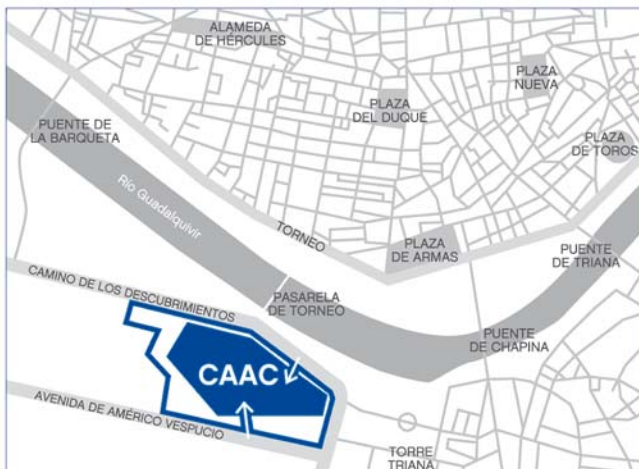
Avda. Américo Vespucio nº2

Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

Transport

C1 and C2 buses

Tickets sales until 30 mis. before closing



General Idea Editions 1967-1995 organized by the *Blackwood Gallery* (University of Toronto at Mississauga, Canada), with the financial assistance of the *Canada Council for the Arts*, the *Ontario Arts Council*, the *Andy Warhol Foundation*, and *Foreign Affairs Canada*.

