



A CONVERSATION WITH GIULIO PAOLINI by Susan Taylor

Giulio Paolini, recently the subject of a major retrospective exhibition at the Nouveau Musée in Lyon, was also featured at this year's Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto with a one-man exhibition titled *La casa di Lucrezio*. The following conversation with Paolini took place in Spoleto June 25, 1984, in Italian and uses the exhibition as a context for a discussion of his work, focusing on some of the artist's recurring themes and processes. In this most recent installation, as in his previous works, he has incorporated many of the principles and concepts he has examined and confronted since 1960. Old works may be seen in new guise. The materials and processes used in much of Paolini's work are also reproductive. Photography and lithography rank among them, and he has also frequently made use of the plaster cast. The plaster cast and the photograph represent two equivalents for Paolini. Each reproduces an image, a reflection of art; this "neutrality" of material enables Paolini to explore the relation of art to history, theory, and perhaps even art itself. The relationship between artist and spectator has also always been a consideration in Paolini's work. Italo Calvino has remarked that Paolini does not exhibit "real pictures," rather "moments in the relationship between the person who makes the picture, the person who looks at it and the material object that the picture is." Paolini first presented his concept of the interchangeable roles of artist and spectator in a work dating from 1967 titled *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto* (Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto). In this work, he has given Lotto's painting *Ritratto di giovane* (Portrait of a Young Man) a new title and reproduced it as a black and white photograph on canvas. Here, Paolini has reversed the accepted perception of the painting; by changing the title, he has placed the spectator in the position of artist, thereby creating an ambiguous role for both. A similar effect has been achieved in his recent installation piece at Spoleto, also titled *La casa di Lucrezio*, where the same juxtaposition exists between artist/poet and spectator. In yet another way, the role of the viewer is unmistakable in Spoleto. Whether confronted with an illusionistic perspectival device or forced to a specific point of the installation, the spectator must

participate in and consequently seek to interpret Paolini's meaning.

The work of Giulio Paolini eludes characterization. He has rejected conventional media—he is neither a painter nor a sculptor. He prefers to present his work as an ensemble or "whole." Contemplative in nature, this work causes one to reflect on the role of art and the artist in our time. I would like to thank Mario and Dora Pieroni and Giuliana Setari for their assistance in the preparation of this interview.

Susan Taylor Your exposure in the United States has been somewhat more limited than in Europe, although you have been in a number of group shows.

Giulio Paolini Yes, I had a one-man show in New York at Sperone Westwater Fischer in 1977. At this moment I cannot remember all



Giulio Paolini, *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto*, photograph on canvas (11-3/4x9-1/2 in.), 1967.

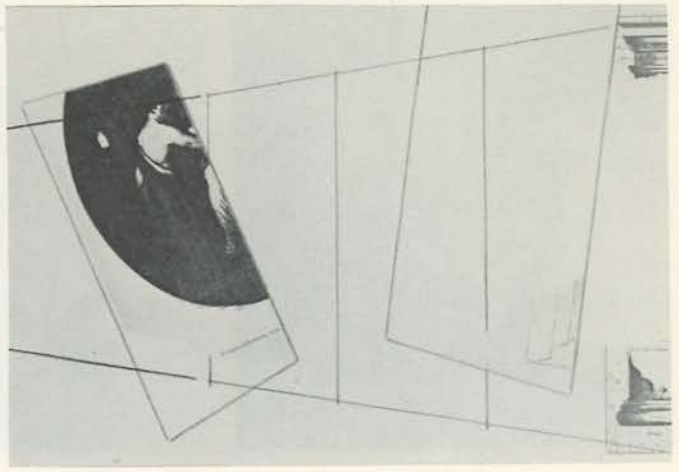
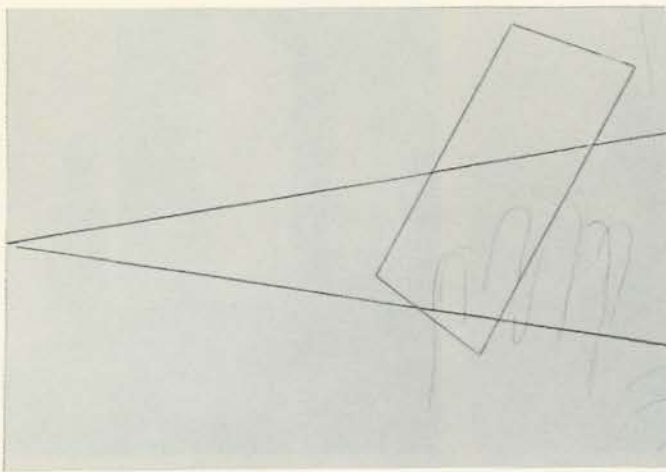
of the group shows—I participated in one exhibition in Chicago, *Europe in the Seventies*, and currently there is the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, where I believe *Mimesi* has been installed.

ST You also appeared in the exhibition at LAICA in Los Angeles this year.

GP Yes, this past January, but I did not attend that particular exhibition. It does not surprise me that current information on my work is fairly scarce in the United States. Now, however, I will try to gather my courage for an exhibition next season. I believe that, at this point, it is time.

ST Tell me about your current exhibition here in Spoleto.

GP Well, the exhibition has a title, and it therefore presents itself as an original and new occasion. This does not prevent my including certain works from the 1960s and 1970s, but I am tired of doing exhibitions that are simply selections of good pieces. What excites me now is to give a reason for an exhibition. In other words, it is important to present the exhibition itself as a work of art. In this case, in Spoleto, there is one specific work, *La casa di Lucrezio*, signifying "the house of the poet," which has given this exhibition its title. It is a complex of elements that comprise one single work. A series of plaster casts on bases are placed in front of a series of windows that line the exhibition space. This creates the hypothesis that each figure, or each phase of the same figure, is placed there to reflect—and this is the question—or provoke the other works in the exhibition. In arithmetical terms, 11 busts define the space, and 11 of my works are contained within it. It is as if, together with 11 independent works, there were the figure of the artist or poet who created them. It is also as if, in this case, the poet were the spectator, so that the true author remains unknown. There is a bit of this specular, visual game I always play which provokes an ambiguity, a continuous



Giulio Paolini, *Idea del tempio della pittura*, four photolithographs (9-7/8x14-1/2 in.), 1983. Courtesy Giuliana Setari, New York.

questioning of the fact that the work of art and the artist are two specular things. The artist, at the same time that he is the author, is also the spectator of the work and vice versa.

ST You examine the image as it is portrayed and its relationship to artist and spectator?

GP Yes, I have always said and done things which tend to give the spectator the same qualities as the author of a work. This is an argument which should be interpreted with some caution; if not, it can become ridiculous. However, there exists in my work the intention that the author or artist of a given work is nothing more than a privileged spectator. It is because of this factor that I say the work is something that reveals itself to the author in a somewhat Platonic sense. The work already exists; the author intervenes to unmask it, to render it credible. The author is someone who raises the curtain on a scene which awaits revelation.

ST You also leave the spectator to interpret the representation, which at times can be ambiguous.

GP Certainly, this is true. There is a cultural/geographic character inherent in my work. I know that a foundation, a repository of traditions, exists in our culture for the way we conduct relationships, for the way we interpret the efficacy of a work of art, in short, for the way in which we communicate. I do not know your culture as well as my own, and I see from your question that this could pose a problem. But I am fairly removed from those who wish their work to serve as a form of communication. More than anything, I want to give my work a for-

mal definition in the moment it is realized, and therefore I am not able to take responsibility for the effect that a work has.

ST There are many representations that you use in your work which are grounded not only in Italian culture but in Renaissance and Mannerist ideas and theories. For example, you have used the theory of perspective, the theory of Lomazzo, as well as classical sculpture and works by Leonardo, Bronzino, Lotto. Would you say this is part of your cultural/geographic orientation?

GP Exactly. My "palette," shall we say, is something that is consolidated in a tradition of culture that is not Anglo-Saxon. There are probably an infinite number of interesting and stimulating points of comparison between the two, but I am more in synchrony with the historical connections you have mentioned.

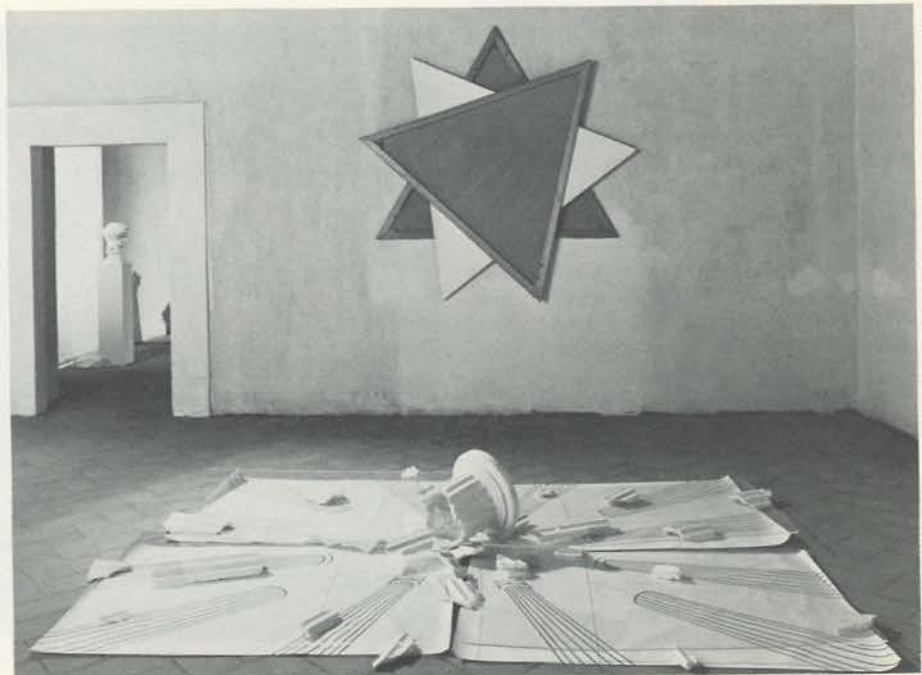
ST But those concepts you do treat are not so obscure that they cannot be understood.

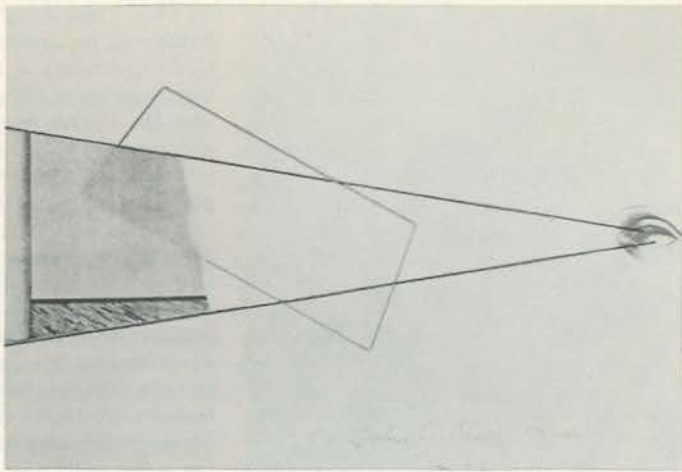
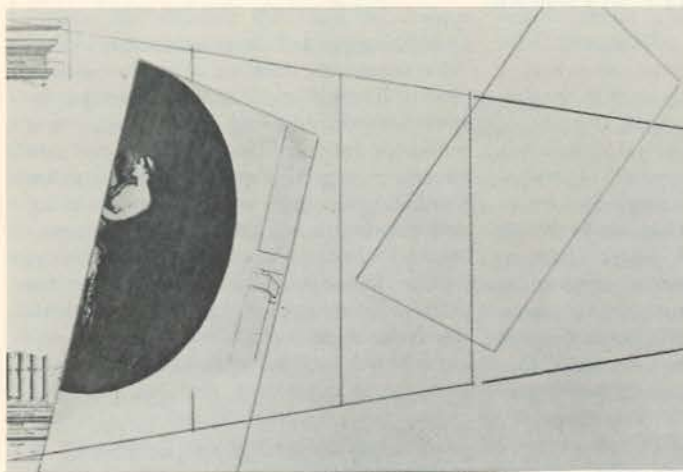
GP No, I try to do what I can to make them understandable, readable. What excites me is to find a form of expression which is understandable today, which is contemporary, something which perhaps is not in tomorrow's set of values, but, more importantly, refers to those of yesterday. The fact that this can be discussed perhaps legitimizes me as a contemporary artist.

ST How does the Spoleto exhibition differ from your show in Lyon?

GP The exhibition in Lyon was more involved. It presented my work from 1960 to the present, and therefore there were more works, and it was thematically larger in scope. However, as in Spoleto, I did not merely place the works in chronological order, selecting my best pieces. Rather, I tried to identify certain thematic components in my work up to the present, thereby creating an exhibition and catalogue which could be perceived as a "whole." I selected nine

Giulio Paolini, *La casa di Lucrezio*, 11 plaster busts on bases (47-1/4x11-3/4x11-3/4 in. ea.), 1981-84. Details of this installation piece can be seen on page 165 and at right. It creates the setting for the exhibition *La casa di Lucrezio* at Spoleto, which includes other Paolini works. On the wall at right is his *Decima musa*, three triangular canvases (67x67 in.), 1976. Courtesy Marilena Bonomo, Bari. On the floor is *Hierapolis*, fragments of gesso and photographic enlargements (39-1/2x59 in.). On page 167 is *Hierapolis* as it was installed in 1982. Courtesy the artist, Turin.





diverse areas, let's say nine "chapters" of my work, and nine separate spaces were used in the museum. I categorized my work, although it is very much tied together and sequential in nature, and tried to create nine divergent paths radiating from one central point.

ST What about your latest piece, which was exhibited in Lyon?

GP It is titled *Il trionfo della rappresentazione*. It is, at this moment, the latest phase of my work and the theme or argument I am most involved with at this time. It is not here in Spoleto, but I will refer to this work in my future exhibitions.

ST By making other versions?

GP By using it in such a way as to make all my work that I have done up to now both explicit and readable.

ST How would you characterize the development of your imagery over the years?

GP I often think that my work is interpreted from a point of view with which I do not agree—especially earlier work, which was more analytical, how shall I say, a bit less "explosive" than today's. Too much has been said about its being analytical work—more precisely—conceptual. I do not believe that I have ever renounced, ever been able to abandon the problem of the *immagine*—the image. There was a moment for the so-called pure Conceptualists—above all, the Anglo-Saxons such as Art Language, Kosuth, etc.—in which the sphere of the image was set aside and something was said about art itself. I have never taken this route because I was never able to renounce the mystery and also the sensuality that the image always involves. In this sense, even if there has been a certain process which, over the last 20 years has achieved its own coherence in my work, I have never tried "a priori" for this consistency. But I have always, little by little, I would say, picture by picture, searched for

the *immagine*, the absolute image, with careful control. This has placed me in a conceptual realm. . . . My expression is internalized and less explicit.

ST What do you think of the current situation with its "explosion" of images in painting?

GP I do not understand enough about the situation to be able to give an opinion, but . . . probably there is a desire on the part of everyone to give a certain authority and importance to these images. The so-called graffiti painting, this latest thing, seems to me a "guilt complex," a cultural differentiation on the part of the intellectual class, which realizes it has lost contact with the terms of everyday reality and therefore accepts a reality, not necessarily shared, but ideologically desirable, which has eluded them. It seems acceptance, on the part of the cultural elite, of expressions which are more social than aesthetic. And this also is something of a "protestant" or European approach.

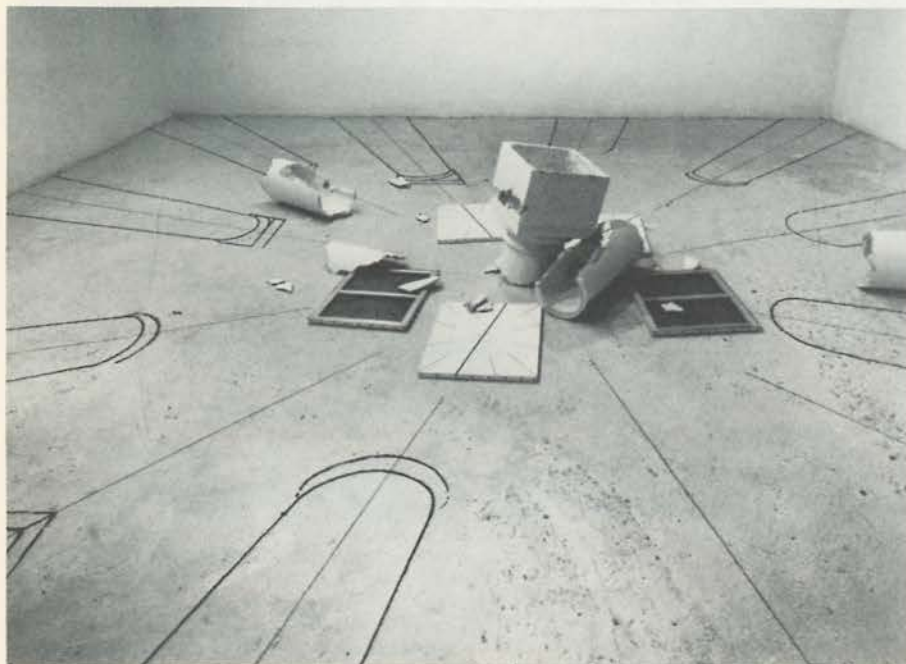
ST What do you mean by "protestant?"

GP By protestant I mean the difference, by now evident, that exists between these two cultures: "catholic" and "protestant." In other words, a protestant is one who lives his life in the first person with respect to reality and who adapts to and judges in the first person what is before him. The catholic is one who always uses an institution as an intermediary and therefore takes less responsibility for his freedom and way of life. So it seems that this new art is accepted because, at this moment, there is probably a necessity to accept those social realities which, in fact, do not belong to the cultural game. But the cultural elite has tried to assimilate them and therefore give them greater dignity.

ST You have collaborated with others in a variety of media: prints, books, scenography for theater. I saw a print portfolio published by Bruno Corà. Have you done others?

GP I have not done a great many prints, but yes, there are others.

ST But they also come from other works. No? *Idea del tempio della pittura* first appeared





Giulio Paolini

in Corà's publication *A.E.I.U.O.*

GP Yes. The portfolio you have seen is a facsimile of a project I did for that magazine. At first, I thought it would only appear in the magazine, but it is also fine as a portfolio. But in this work, as in others, I have never indiscriminately put together a series of graphic images. When there is a portfolio, it is always like a narrative, in other words, one thing next to another, which forms . . .

ST A complete work or total image.

GP Yes. The portfolio, like the Spoleto exhibition, is not a résumé of the things I have done but a complete discourse.

ST You have also published a number of books—*Atto unico in tre quadri*, *L'arte e lo spazio*, *Idem* with Italo Calvino, and others. These are comprised of both images and writings. How do you define the relationship between the written word and the picture?

GP Even if the emphasis is on the art—that is, the picture—I do not want to say that I never illustrate a phrase. Often I make a picture and need to comment upon it, to give it something, which is never an explanation but rather something in verbal terms that echoes the image. The phrase does not explain the work, rather it constitutes a “pendant” in words. Because of this practice, I have sometimes put together texts, pictures, and drawings which have resulted in books, something which refers to things both said and done.

ST You've also done theatrical scenography, haven't you? Wasn't there something of yours at this year's Biennale in Venice?

Giulio Paolini, *L'arte e lo spazio*, artist's book, four photographs illustrating a writing by Martin Heidegger, 1983.

GP Yes. There was a series of theatrical performances by artists. I collaborated with Carlo Quartucci, a director with whom I have done about 80% of my work in the theater. He is particularly sensitive to a kind of performance which is theatrical, because it takes place in a theater, but which is a visual phenomenon rather than a textual interpretation. For example, he has worked with Kounellis, Weiner, and others. Part of Quartucci's own special poetic commitment is to ask us to participate, not as scenographers for a theatrical work, but as creators of a theatrical situation which is neither theater nor even the visual arts—a strange combination. Yes, interesting . . . very tiring . . . because it takes a great deal of dedication.

ST Tell me about the use of photography in your work.

GP I use photography to reproduce images, and it is somewhat more direct than drawing. In other words, I realize now that photography can be discussed in my work as my most frequent and constant point of reference. For example, in the work you have seen today, *Hierapolis*, those four sheets placed under a piece of plexiglass are photographic enlargements of a drawing that I had done on a much reduced scale. Why? Not only because it is more difficult to make another larger drawing but rather, more importantly, because one is specular of the other on a diagonal. Therefore, practically the same drawing is reproduced, twice upright and twice upside down. It has been done, how should I say, in order to conform to a type of drawing that reflects itself. I preferred to make the drawing only once, small, and then have it enlarged and overturned because it seemed more appropriate than having a mirrorlike image made of the same drawing which then would be reproduced and not

copied. So here, for example, the photographic aspect is not greatly in evidence. What is evident, however, is that it also happens to be a photograph. I use photography in a number of diverse ways—always as a technique for reproduction, never just as a picture. I use it as a system of reproduction whether I reproduce an old master painting or a drawing that I have done the moment before. I do not use the medium as a photographer. I have never photographed, yet at this point in my work, photography is an undeniable factor. I use the miracle which is photography because it is just that—a small miracle.

ST With regard to other techniques, there is a perspectival device you use in the lithograph based on the *Hierapolis* installation—a play on perspective which is a different interpretation of the installation yet based on the same drawing. It has an illusionistic effect—almost theatrical.

GP Yes, yes. In the sense of *trompe l'oeil*.

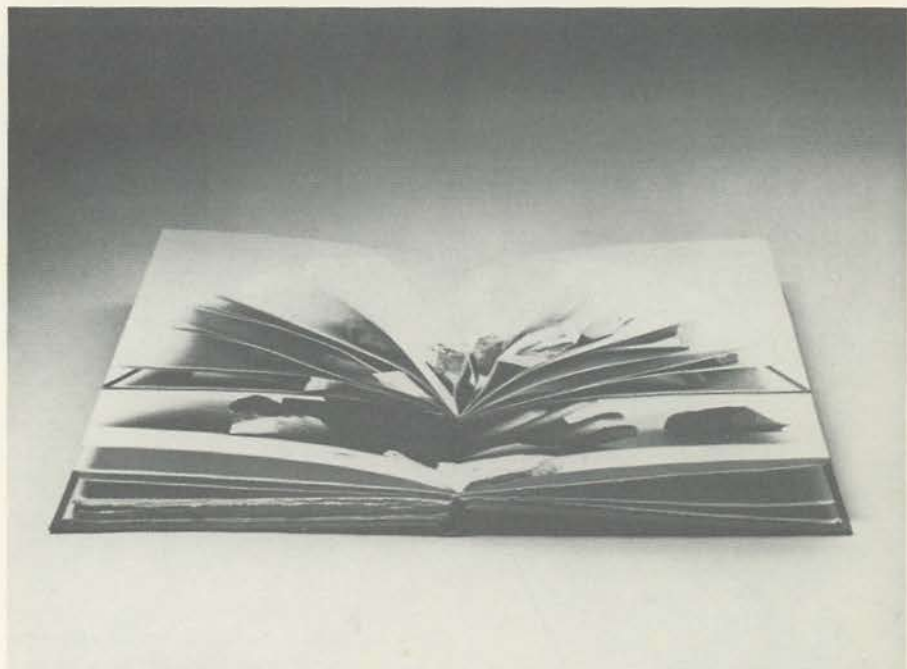
ST Yes, like a Baroque ceiling.

GP What is that called? There is an exact term for it: “da sotto in su.” Like Bibiena.

ST It is to be viewed from a specific point. Here, too, you have achieved a type of theatrical tableau, but on a more intimate scale.

GP Yes, for example, *Hierapolis*, currently installed on the floor in Spoleto, is a portable version of the first version I did, for an exhibition in Paris at Yvon Lambert, where I drew the perspective that you see now on those sheets of paper on the entire floor. There perhaps the effect of vertigo was even greater because you found yourself walking above a level that does not exist in the imagination. But that type of installation cannot be done everywhere.

ST What significance do the materials have that you use in your work? For example, the



broken plaster and torn photographs?

GP The plaster cast and the photograph are equivalents for me because they represent two techniques which reproduce models of images. Even though they are different materials, they have the same function—to produce a simulacrum. A photograph and a plaster cast tend to give an absolute illusion of another thing, but I have always been careful to reveal the material itself. In other words, a photograph is a skin, an intangible diaphragm which provides you with this miracle of the representation of something. However, it is also a piece of paper. Similarly, a plaster cast can reproduce something which is in Greece. Yet plaster is also a material you can touch and therefore when it breaks it is revealed for what it is. It becomes an image not of what it recounts but of what it truly is.

ST The material itself.

GP Yes, the material itself. For example, when I use the reversed canvas at times, it is the same thing. If I use it directly—in the conventional way—the canvas becomes the world. Reversed, it is only a canvas.

ST You therefore reveal the impermanence of the material?

GP Yes, the conventionality and precariousness if you like. In other words, these materials are not absolutes.

ST You just mentioned that you did the same installation in Paris. Do you work often with different versions of the same piece?

GP Fairly often. It depends on the case—there is no real fixed rule. There are certain works that come in editions and are therefore the same. But some works gradually undergo certain adjustments according to the space, and still others are considered complete. But since they still exist today, they return to give rise to new works, perhaps even eight years later, because they begin to be seen in another way.

ST I can see why two very diverse adjectives, "enigmatic" and "analytical," have been used to characterize your work.

GP Yes! That's true, isn't it? Yes, they are opposing words. I don't quite know how to respond, perhaps because I am looking for a reply that would be a bit summary. The attention is analytical, but the result is enigmatic. It is not a given that if the discipline of analysis is present there will be an analytical work. On the contrary, I may turn back in "fear" of the impossible. Sometimes the analytical search succeeds and then the steps I have already taken prove me to be analytical. Another time, the resulting work is more obscure and in that case, I am enigmatic. Yes, this is very strange.

Susan Taylor is a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, specializing in Italian Renaissance art. She worked extensively with contemporary art while curatorial coordinator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. **Giulio Paolini** lives and works in Turin.

NEWS OF THE PRINT WORLD: *People & Places*

Is New York becoming the world center of the old master print market? "It certainly seems to be tending in that direction," admits Nancy Bialler, who came from Sotheby's Print Department in London to open a New York branch for C. G. Boerner, the Düsseldorf dealer, November 8. "London was the center of the art market historically because it was near the Continent and the incredible richness of the English collections. But in recent years support has not been coming from Britain or even the Continent in the print field. Those building the great collections are U.S. museums and private collectors. Why should they have to go to Europe?" At Boerner's gallery at 61 East 77th Street, which Bialler says "is not a liaison, but an autonomous operation," she will be "starting smallish, seeing what people want," planning no specific shows and publishing no catalogues in the first year, but offering a variety of work, "just to whet people's appetites."

Nicholas Stogdon—former senior vice-president of prints and modern illustrated books at Christie's and current private old master print dealer in New York—has noticed an increased presence of European dealers at American print auctions in recent years but adds that American dealers, too, like to shop abroad "because clients will not have seen the works too much." He feels more dealers in a market tend to stabilize and strengthen it. "They add depth and consistency because they can sort out the salable from the unsalable at auction." There will be "more competition for the finer things," but there will also be "more confidence, more to look at, more people to talk to."

"Although we've had some very good Rembrandt and Dürer prints pass quietly through here in the past," Aldis Browne says the presence of Dr. Edward Mead Johnson, an expert in old master drawings and paintings who recently joined the staff, should not be construed as a change of emphasis for the gallery. "We're not expecting to increase our focus substantially in old master prints—Johnson is not a print person—but we will carry a slightly larger stock of old master material." Dr. Johnson was hired primarily "because customer interest in old masters was straining our ability to talk with authority on the subject, so we thought it was a logical direction to follow."

"More fine prints, both old master and modern, are for sale in New York than anywhere else in the world. The fact that we have ten or 12 old master dealers in New York is remarkable," says David Tunick, who welcomes the presence of another dealer. "Ruth [-Maria Muthmann, proprietor of C. G. Boerner, Düsseldorf] is a very good friend. She informed me before their public announcement that Boerner was planning the move, and I was delighted." Does he think the presence of Boerner will affect his business? "I hope it does. Boerner, no

doubt, has clients in the United States I don't know. Now when they come to New York to see Boerner's, maybe they will come visit us, too." As for Boerner's impact in the salesrooms, "I don't agree that their presence will affect the New York print auction market. Galleries like Boerner and ourselves already know about a fine print when it comes up at auction anywhere in the world. The interesting thing about Boerner's move is that they are coming not from a country as economically unstable as England, for instance. Germany is wealthy. They have some great private and institutional collectors. That is no longer so much the case in England."

All the dealers expect the presence of even more dealers to expand the market. "I wouldn't say 'My God, there are too many dealers,'" cautions Nancy Bialler. "Competition is beneficial for everyone."

Tale of Two Cities. Eleanor Sayre, who joined the staff of the **Boston Museum of Fine Arts** in 1945, becoming curator of its Department of Prints and Drawings in 1967, has retired. Her successor is Clifford S. Ackley, who joined the department in 1966 and worked on her landmark exhibitions *Rembrandt: Experimental Etcher*, *Dürer: Master Printmaker*, and *The Changing Image: Prints by Francisco Goya*. In 1981 he won the Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Award for the "most exemplary contribution to museum scholarship" for the catalogue to his own landmark exhibition, *Printmaking in the Age of Rembrandt*. Ackley's study of 17th-century Dutch prints had been pursued since 1959 at the University of Utrecht, Harvard University, and the museums of Europe as well as Boston. But, as PCN readers know well, his expertise spans centuries. He has been responsible for the acquisition of photographs and contemporary prints and drawings at Boston, and only this year coordinated the exhibition *The Modern Art of the Print: Selections from the Collection of Lois and Michael Torf* and organized *10 Painters and Sculptors Draw*. Asked about his plans for the future, Ackley replied, "It's too soon to say I'll be planning this exhibition or that. Right now all our thoughts are on Degas, and Eleanor is doing Goya in 1985. I've been with the collection a long time. It's very rich, and a relationship with a collection like it takes time. It's what has made me stay all these years. I can still learn from it. Eleanor and I are different people, of course, but fundamentally I want to continue the traditions of the department because I've been part of them a very long time."

The **Art Institute of Chicago** has announced the appointment of Douglas W. Druick, currently curator of European and American prints at the National Gallery of Canada, as the first Prince Trust curator of prints and drawings. He assumes full-time duties in January. The endowed chair was established last March in memory of the late