

TRUE.**BLISS.**

True.BLISS. 5 December 1996 through 26 January 1997

LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS 6522 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90028

NEUTRAL GROUNDS / FERTILE TERRITORY:
A HISTORY OF BLISS

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even before it was formally named or fully conceived in the minds of its creators. In late 1987, three ex-colleagues of the Art Center College of Design, friends, and residents of 825 N. Michigan Avenue in the Bungalow Heaven area of

Pasadena — Kenneth Riddle, Jorge Pardo, and Gayle Barklie — together decided to utilize the garage that had been

recently drywalled as Kenneth's studio as a temporary exhibition space. The space started out modestly, described by Riddle as "a school-related project, a funky idea" (its first unofficial use was to exhibit an Art Center class project on which Kenneth and Gayle had collaborated).^① While it has been sustained by "those who became enthusiastically involved" and "put their time into making it happen," Bliss's survival has been largely due to the diligence of Kenneth, today its sole inhabitant as well as its director.^② As one might expect from its unlikely and humorous beginnings, and throughout all of its peculiar manifestations, Bliss's unceremonious inaugural exhibition prophetically and poignantly characterized the rest of its nearly nine years of programming.

The first project, staged throughout the garage and the house, was the NEIGHBORHOOD ART SHOW, a project typical of one of *those ideas* a group of friends and roommates derives from just sitting around drinking beer. What initially seemed a facetious concept, however, resonates not only with ingenuousness but also venturesome boldness now that we and the artists involved look back on it. For the NEIGHBORHOOD ART SHOW, Kenneth, Jorge, and Gayle canvassed their area, inviting "all of the neighbors within a one block radius of Bliss to include anything they had made or that was important to them."^③ What must have at first seemed a peculiar request elicited an enthusiastic response. These unassuming curators then asked some Art Center colleagues — Wendy Adest, Victor Estrada, Doug Hammett, Jill Field, and George Porcari — to contribute to the exhibition. Uninformed of the neighbors' participation until the opening party, their school friends' reactions were mixed: The neighbors loved it, it was a big party for them. However, some of the artists were initially "quite pissed off," Jorge noted, to discover among their work objects as oddly fetishized as a beloved pair of shock absorbers, as sentimental as a Haitian painting cherished by the owner's widow, and as outrightly random as a treasured piece of candy.^④ What resulted was a clever and highly entertaining exhibition that not only confronted and blurred that fine line between that which is art and that which is not art, but set the tone for the eclectic programming that was to follow.

It was after the NEIGHBORHOOD ART SHOW that Kenneth, Jorge, and Gayle decided to choose a name for the space. Although no clear goals were yet cohesively articulated among the three originators, a name was imminent. Their research eventually paid off at the City of Pasadena, where they discovered the name of the house's original Craftsman-era architect, GUY S. BLISS.

^① Kenneth Riddle, conversation, June 16, 1996. ^② George Porcari, telephone conversation, July 19, 1996. ^③ Kenneth Riddle, conversation. ^④ Jorge Pardo, telephone conversation, July 9, 1996.



Doug Hammett *Cake Icing Mandala*, 1996 fondant icing [detail]