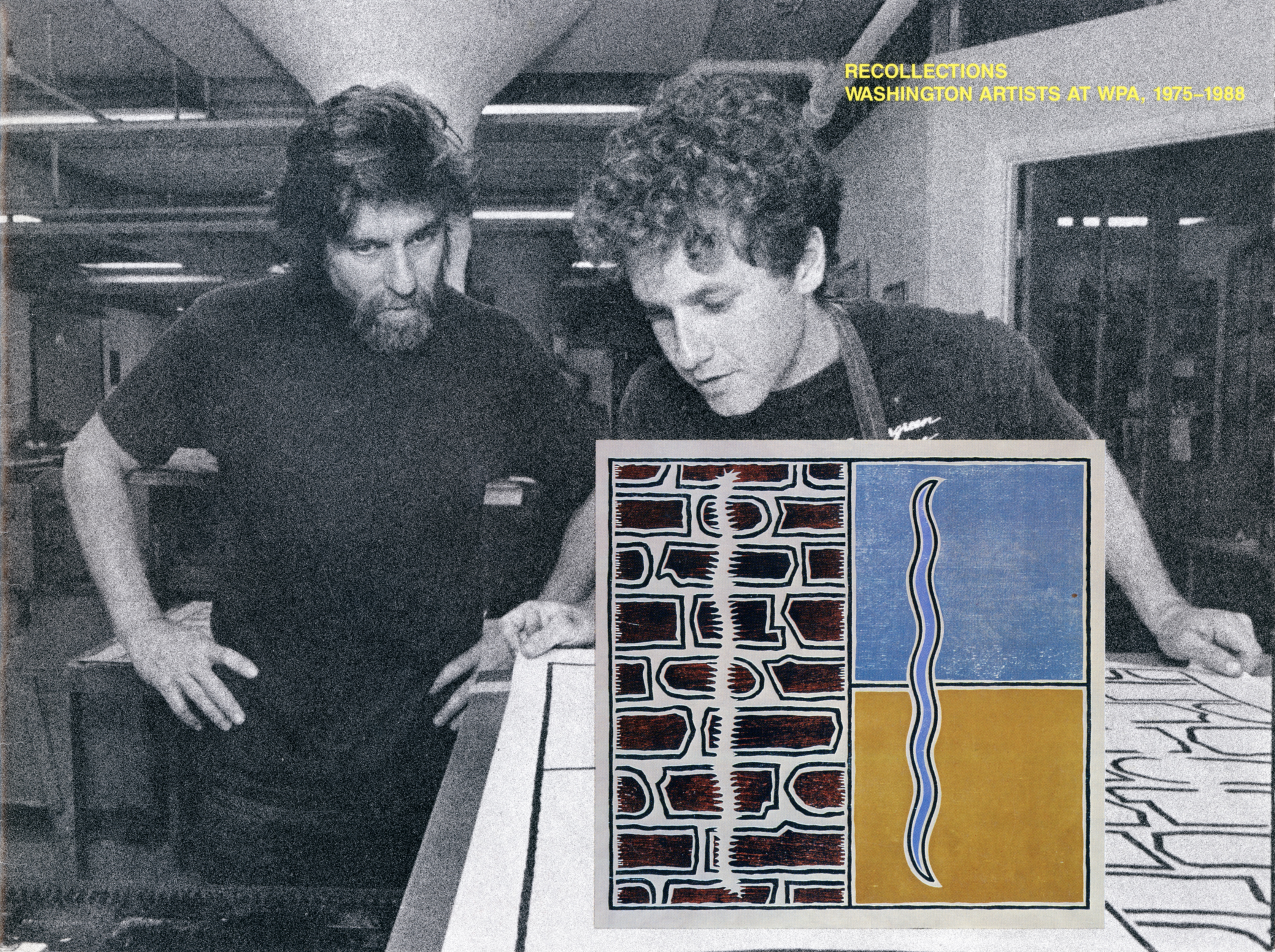
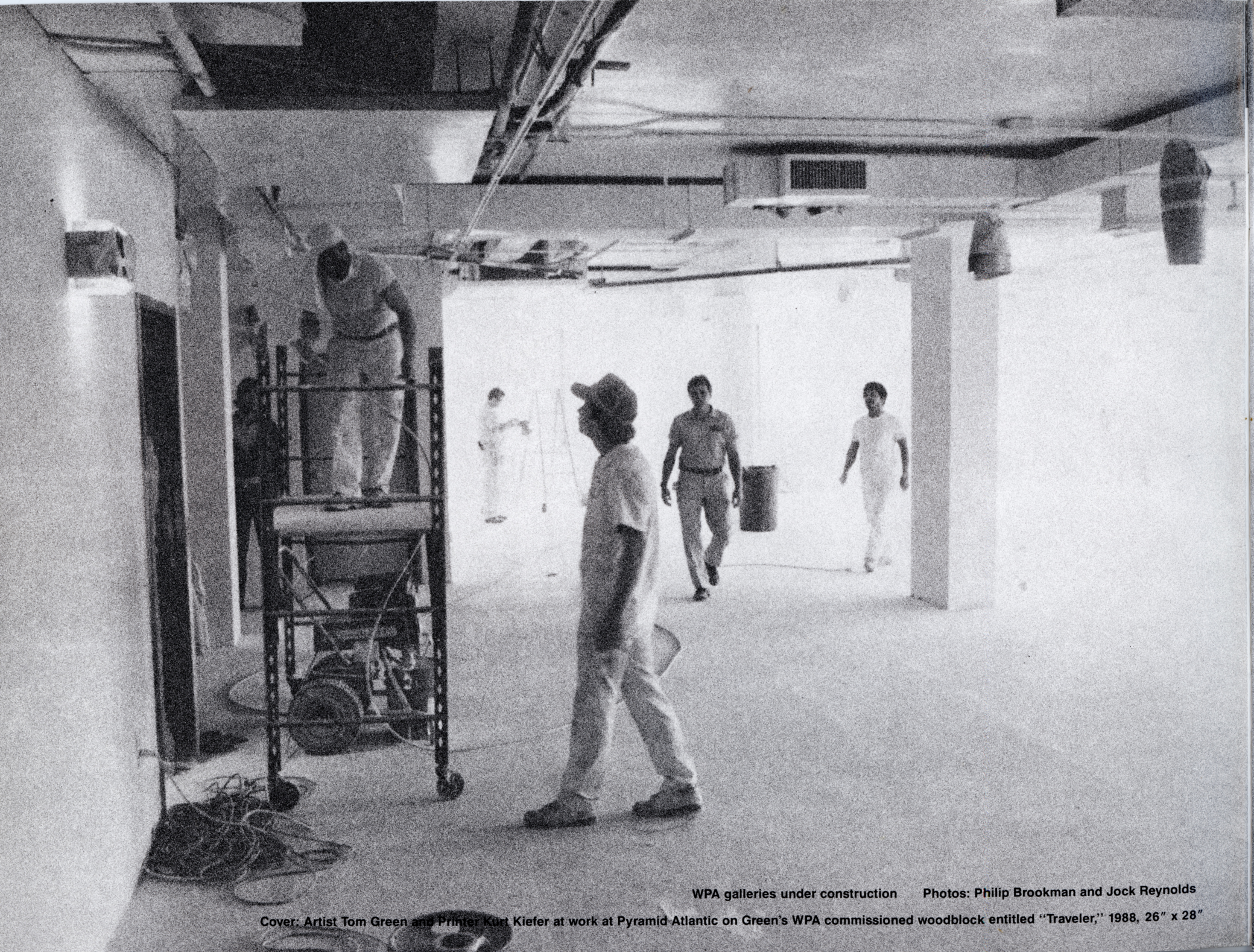
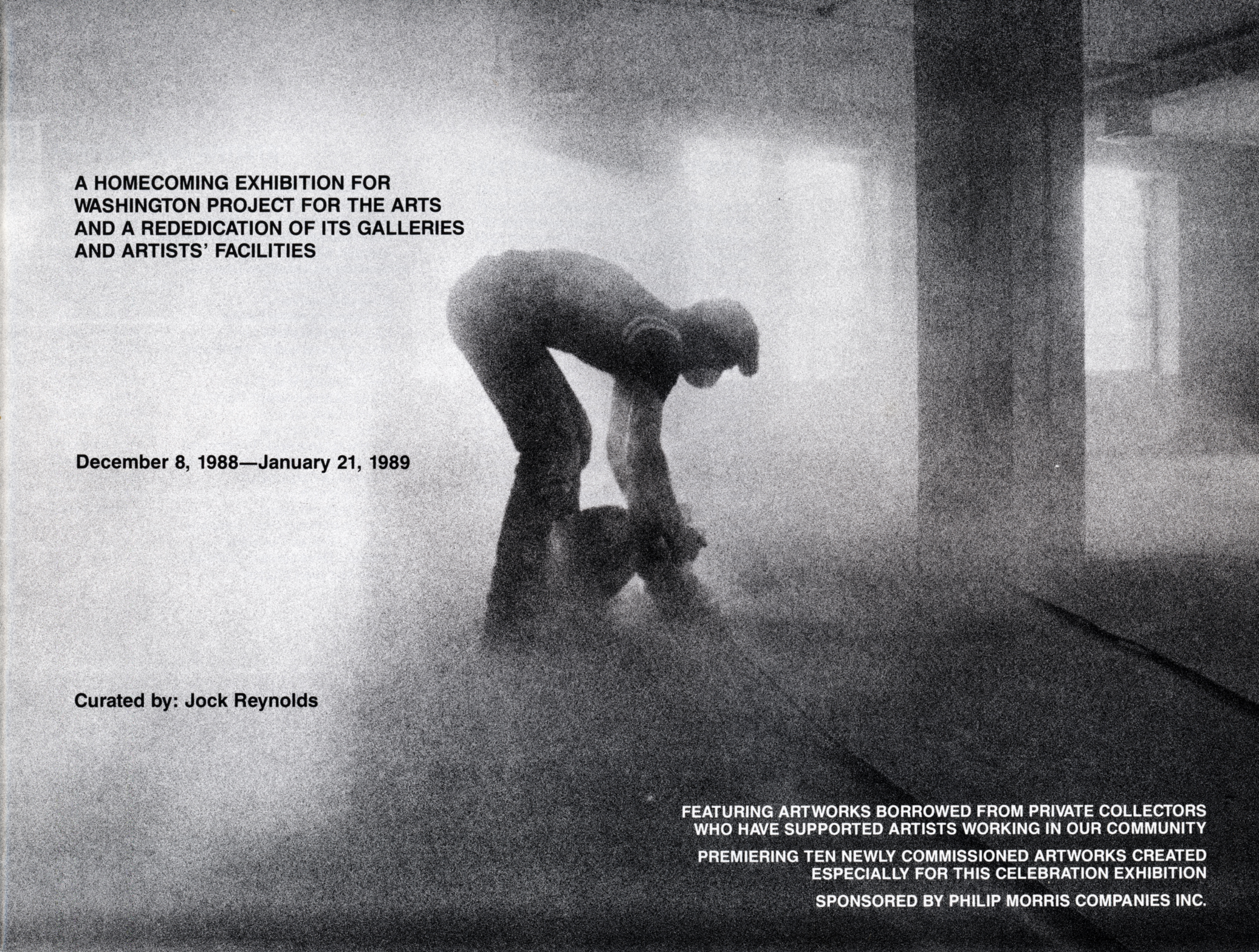
RECOLLECTIONS
WASHINGTON ARTISTS AT WPA, 1975–1988





WPA galleries under construction Photos: Philip Brookman and Jock Reynolds

Cover: Artist Tom Green and Printer Kurt Kiefer at work at Pyramid Atlantic on Green's WPA commissioned woodblock entitled "Traveler," 1988, 26" x 28"



A HOMECOMING EXHIBITION FOR WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS AND A REDEDICATION OF ITS GALLERIES AND ARTISTS' FACILITIES

December 8, 1988—January 21, 1989

Curated by: Jock Reynolds

FEATURING ARTWORKS BORROWED FROM PRIVATE COLLECTORS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED ARTISTS WORKING IN OUR COMMUNITY

PREMIERING TEN NEWLY COMMISSIONED ARTWORKS CREATED ESPECIALLY FOR THIS CELEBRATION EXHIBITION

SPONSORED BY PHILIP MORRIS COMPANIES INC.

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition salutes the achievements of Washington artists who have shown at WPA since its founding in 1975. This exhibition also acknowledges the importance of patronage, for it recognizes the interests and commitment of many who have purchased artwork created in our community. Indeed, all of the pieces in this show have been borrowed from individual or corporate collections formed in the Washington area.

Offered as a re-dedication of WPA's newly refurbished home in the Jenifer Building, this exhibition also celebrates the working partnership and generosity of artists and arts supporters which has enabled WPA to preserve an enduring forum for the work of living artists in downtown Washington.

In all honesty, I wish I had had more time to prepare this exhibition. This past year at WPA has been a breakneck pace of ongoing programs, two moves, and a major renovation effort—all hinging on the efforts and success of our first capital campaign. However, during the last six months, I have been able to visit more than sixty private collections and review the work of more than two hundred area artists who have shown at WPA. The viewings and conversations along the way only whetted my appetite to see and learn more. In my travels, I was constantly given new leads and suggestions and I have pursued numerous works right up to the printing deadline of this catalogue.

I will also readily admit that I have missed a number of collections that I wanted to visit. I am saddened that I have been unable to include many deserving artists in this show. In any case, what you do have to view and consider, are the work of sixty two artists as represented in forty eight collections from our community. I trust this will provide more than ample evidence that contemporary art is alive and well in Washington.

Having complained, let me also say that in many ways my curatorial task was an easy one. As I reviewed WPA's exhibition record since Alice Denney founded the organization in a dollar-a-year/urban renewal building on G Street, I quickly realized that those who had curated before me had always had their finger on the pulse of Washington's artists' community. Five of the artists in this show, for example: Tom Green, Lee Haner, Leslie Kuter, Sharron Antholt and John Dickson were all featured in Alice Denney's WPA Inaugural show of 1975. Thirteen years later, their work has endured and grown. Each of them remains highly prolific and active in our midst.

Jack Rassmussen's early curatorial work at WPA was an inspiration to me, as was his subsequent and valiant attempt to found the first downtown commercial gallery supporting Washington artists. He was ahead of his time and he had a great eye for talent. My predecessor, Al Nodal, programmed at high velocity, launched WPA's Public Art Site program and also hired Olivia George and Joy Silverman as curators. Each of them supported many of the artists whose work has found its way into this exhibition and they have all gone on to direct important artists organizations elsewhere in the country.

And it must be mentioned that numerous guest curators have played a key role in bringing public attention to many outstanding artists working in Washington. Nina Felshin's "Metarealities" in 1980 exhibition yielded Lisa Brotman, Manon Cleary, William Newman and Joe Shannon, among others. The work of these artists is strongly felt in this exhibition.

Howard Fox and Walter Hopps are museum curators who served on WPA's board and often supported Washington artists in shows arranged for our organization. Fox's "Stacking/ Rigging/Binding," in 1980, was his first attempt as a curator to sponsor installation works. It brought Jim Sanborn back to WPA four years after Jack Rassmussen first showed Sanborn's sculpture at WPA, and four years before a Sanborn installation would appear as one of Fox's selections in the Hirshhorn's "Content" show. Hopps honored "Ten Veteran Painters" at WPA in 1979, acknowledging those who had worked at least 25 years in the Washington community. He knew well the long odds pioneering artists had faced in this city. John Robinson and Jacob Kainen were amongst that group and their work is included also in this show. Hopps' "Poetic Objects" exhibition at WPA in 1982 enabled him to work with a theme he has since fine-tuned as Director of Houston's Menil Collection. "Poetic Objects" also included artists of international reputation such as Edward Kienholz, Robert Rauschenberg, Lucas Samaras, Jasper Johns and H.C. Westerman, alongside Washington artists such as Charlie Sleichter, Suzanne Codi, Sam Gilliam, and William Christenberry, all of whom have work in this exhibition. Hopps helped give others the confidence to put Washington artists in the public eye in the company of well-known artists from around the Nation and the World.

Most of WPA's guest curators over the years, however, have been artists and many of them have first identified deserving artists working in this community. At times they have also sought to redress the shortcomings of local museum and gallery programming. No one has made a more important contribution in this area than painter Keith Morrison. His "Alternatives by Black Artists" and "Art in Washington and its Afro-American Presence: 1940–1970" are amongst WPA's most memorable programming achievements. Martha Jackson-Jarvis and Jerome Meadows, both included in this exhibition, came to public attention due to Morrison's efforts. Much of WPA's early commitment to cultural diversity in programming must be credited to Keith Morrison and Sam Gilliam, both of whom served as WPA board chairmen and tirelessly gave input to WPA's scheduling decisions.

WPA's "Options" shows have been curated by artists since their inception, with excellent selections coming from Ed Love, Joe Shannon, Gene Davis, Mary Swift, Alan Stone, and Gayil Nalls. They generously served to provide some of the first notable exhibition opportunities for Washington artists such as Carol Goldberg, Greg Hannan, Yuriko Yamaguchi, Allen Carter, Chris Gardner, Catherine Batza, Stephen Foster, Jackie Hayden and Lisa Scheer, all of whom I've found well represented in Washington collections.

Upon arriving at WPA in 1983, I had the pleasure of working with artist curators Don Russell and Helen Brunner. Together, we continued WPA's support of Washington artists, mounting major solo exhibitions of area artists such as Betsy Packard, Jeff Spaulding, Yuriko Yamaguchi, William Willis and Steve Kruvant. Brunner's "History as Content" show also gave important exposure to Denise Ward-Brown, Mark Clark, and Stephen Foster. Russell's "Distant Landscapes" introduced Steve Estrada, Thomas Mullany and David Krueger to Washington audiences. All of these artists are represented in this "Recollections" exhibition and each is working vigorously and exhibiting often in our city.

WPA's current staff of artist curators continue a tradition of identifying young emerging artists, as they also reinforce continuing commitments to artists WPA has supported in past programs. Mel Watkin has commissioned major installations by David Chung, Michael Platt, Catherine Batza and Herb Menegus. She and I have delighted in providing major exhibition opportunities to Leslie Kuter and Robyn Johnson Ross, whose difficult subjects and charged work, richly deserves strong support. Rick Powell and I collaborated with great satisfaction to produce James Lesesne Wells' sixty year retrospective. Right on the heels of this exhibition, Watkin and Powell have three major shows brewing that will expand WPA's commitment to Washington artists throughout our 1989 schedule. Philip Brookman has designed the newly completed media gallery and editing facility, which now expands the breadth of WPA's exhibition program and ability to commission new works.

It is my hope that visitors to this show will quickly realize that many minds and sensibilities have formed WPA's programs over the years and that WPA's continuing mission has been to stay close to the needs of artists. Through initial exposure, financial underwriting, innovative commissions, support for provocative ideas and working methods and/or retrospective review of major achievements, WPA seeks to deliver a full range of cultural services to working artists and their interested audiences.

In arranging the loans for this exhibition, I must confess that I was pleasantly surprised. When surveying the quantity and quality of collections being formed in our community, I found the support of Washington artists to be stronger than I had orignally anticipated. Corporate collections growing at the Artery Organization, The Washington Post Company, Arnold and Porter, Western Development Company, Sallie Mae and Peat Marwick & Main are all accessioning the work of Washington artists in depth and are providing employees with an abundance of contemporary art in the workplace.

Private collectors such as Cecilia and Frank Ross and Vivienne and Malcolm Lassman have recently commissioned major works by Washington artists for their homes. Betsy and George Frampton have purchased some of the finest paintings being produced by area artists such as Tom Green, William Willis and John Ryan. Others, such as Joshua Smith, Karen and Courtney Lord, and Bruce and Teresa Anderson, have collected individual artists in great depth. I found it very heartening to learn of Smith's major holdings of Jody Mussoffs' and Gayil Nalls' work and the Lords' and Andersons' enthusiastic patronage of Thomas Mullany. More and more individuals seem willing to sustain an ongoing interest in an artist's work, a most healthy development in our community.

Nationally based collections such as those of Ann and Gilbert Kinney, Barbara and Aaron Levine, Robert Lehrman and Eddie Lenkin also contain excellent examples of Washington area art; works that certainly hold their own among stiff competition. I took great pleasure in seeing an Elizabeth Falk sculpture alongside work by Robert Longo and Andy Warhol. William Christenberry's "Dream Building" made such sense sharing space with one of Terry Allen's recent "Youth in Asia" constructions.

As I suspected, there were also strong collections that have been assembled by artists and their spouses. Lisa and Barry Brotman have supported other artists in this community with an impeccable eye, as have Sherry Jones and Alan Stone, and Suzanne Codi and Charlie Sleichter.

Although not as calmly reflective and leisurely pursued as I had hoped, curating this exhibition has left me feeling very optimistic about Washington's progress in becoming a community more hospitable to contemporary artists and their work. I hope this exhibition conveys the enthusiasm I feel and the advances we've witnessed in Washington's cultural growth.

I think that many artists now working in Washington also sense an improving climate of cultural patronage in the nation's capitol. To acknowledge and further encourage this healthy development, Kevin MacDonald (WPA's current Board Chairman) and I have organized a special addition to the "Recollections" exhibition. WPA has commissioned ten limited edition prints by ten of the artists participating in this exhibition. Photographs

of the artists at work at printmaking facilities in our community, along with their finished works, are reproduced in this catalogue for your enjoyment. These prints will be offered as gifts to patrons of WPA's capital campaign and general operating fund as an expression of thanks from Washington artists to the enlightened patronage that has so generously supported the growth of WPA over the years.

So at long last, as we re-dedicate WPA's longterm home in downtown Washington, with its spacious galleries, its artist-designed bookstore, artists' apartment, sculptural stairwell, new media center, and workshop, it is in hope that this community will continue to expand its commitment to living artists and their work.

This exhibition is offered in thanks to all the artists, patrons, WPA members, volunteers, friends, staff and board of directors who have helped make WPA a unique Washington institution. I also wish to give special thanks to Philip Morris Companies Inc. for its thoroughly generous sponsorship of this exhibition, catalogue and commissioned print project.

Jock Reynolds
Executive Director
Washington Project for the Arts

SPONSOR STATEMENT

For years Philip Morris has affirmed the principle that the arts improve the quality of life in towns and cities across America. Early on we also came to realize that a vibrant and vital cultural life begins with living artists who are free to work, create, experiment, and evolve.

That is why we so enthusiastically support WPA. It's one of Washington's direct lifelines to the artists who inspire us with new insights, visions, and ideas. In this exhibition you will find pieces by more than 60 visual artists who have enjoyed support from WPA since it was founded in 1975. Their work tells the whole story.

We know you'll enjoy the exhibition and WPA's newly renovated Jenifer Building facilities.

Hamish Maxwell
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Philip Morris Companies Inc.

WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS
400 SEVENTH STREET N.W. (USE D STREET ENTRANCE)
WASHINGTON D.C. 20004

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