

100 Walkers by Richard Kraft: An Exceptional Art Piece

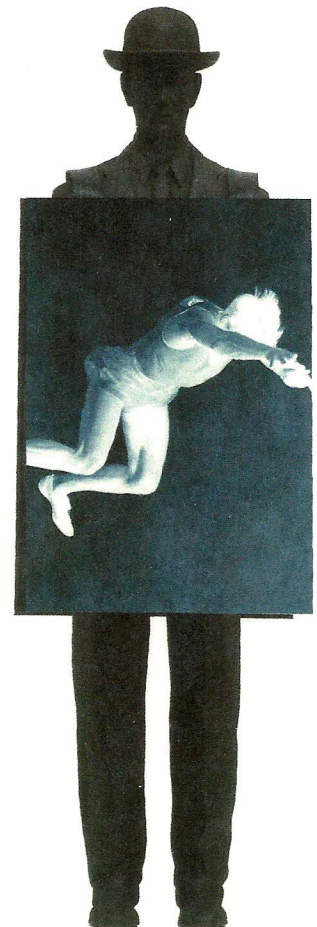
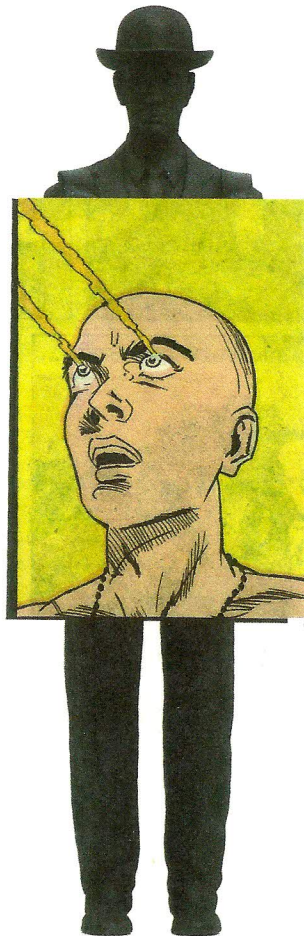
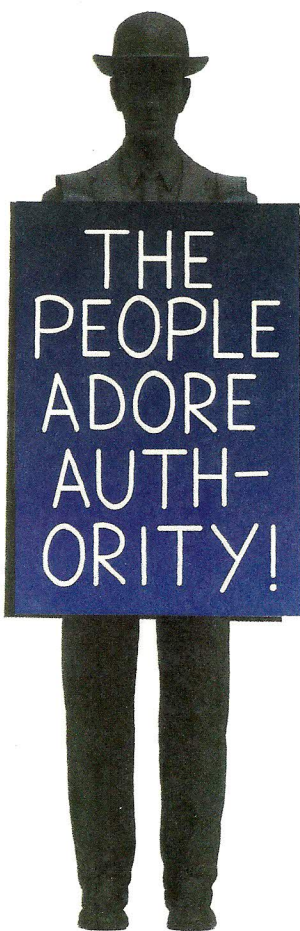
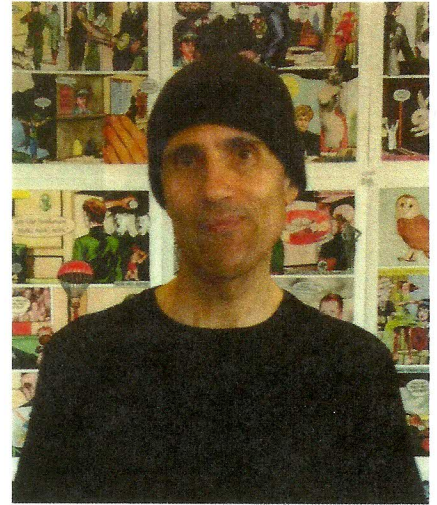
By Laurel Delp

Richard Kraft walks onto the patio of Zinque and comes to a stricken halt. How is he going to pick out an unknown interviewer in this crowd? But I've seen his photo online, and I would recognize that jutting Kirk Douglas-y chin anywhere.

We're here to discuss his upcoming performance piece, *100 Walkers, West Hollywood*, commissioned to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the city's Art on the Outside program — which, until now, has consisted largely of sculpture.

In a marked departure, at 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 18, 100 volunteers wearing bowler hats, black suits and sandwich boards (with different images or aphorisms on each side) will silently walk the streets of West Hollywood. If pressed for information, they will hand out business cards that are equally mysterious.

I ask if the boards' fronts and backs will have a relationship, and he laughs: "Well, yes and no and *sometimes* is the answer to that."



"The boards are not completely random," he explains. "I have taxonomies. So, for instance, there are aphorisms, there are animals, there are images from the Hubble telescope, of water, from children's books, of gay rights activists, Russian dissidents, images of war and resistance to war. That's not all of them, but that's a pretty good list, for now."

Kraft has been influenced by avant-garde composer John Cage and writer Georges Perec. The latter was a follower of turn-of-the-century writer Alfred Jarry, author of "Ubu Roi" and creator of 'Pataphysics, described as the "science of imaginary solutions," or the law of exceptions. Other Jarry followers include Picasso, Ionesco, Artaud, James Joyce, Italo Calvino — and the Marx Brothers. By combining disparate items, images and ideas, Kraft seeks to catapult us from the day-to-day grind into a new way of perceiving that's almost childlike in its ability to revel in the wonder and mystery of being alive.

And while there's a unifying sensibility to his work, he's never pinned down to single medium. He's worked in photography, video, collage and performance. Every move is unexpected.

And *100 Walkers* has been germinating for years. When Kraft was about 8 years old, his mother — who was born in Calcutta's once thriving Jewish community — took him shopping on London's Oxford Street. There, he was captivated by the sight of a man carrying a sign.

"It was basically exhorting people to curb their lust by eating less protein," he says. "Hundreds of people were walking by. Most people were ignoring him, and some people were rude to him.

"As I got older, I would go and look for him. He always had the same sign, and he sold a little booklet. His name was Stanley Green, and people called him 'The Protein Man.' He just really caught my imagination — his courage, his discipline. He was there six days a week, rain or shine, and he cooked his lunch on a Bunsen burner around the corner. He'd bicycle 12 miles to get there. I guess I loved the incongruity of him being there. That stayed with me."

A lot of his work, Kraft explains, has to do with taking what already exists and placing something incongruous onto it, creating a new experience more powerful than the sum of its parts. He's excited that some may not even perceive of *100 Walkers* as art.

"I love the idea that things can resist definition," he says. "To some, it might just be a fragmentary moment that they see and think about. It seems to me really lovely if that happens."

