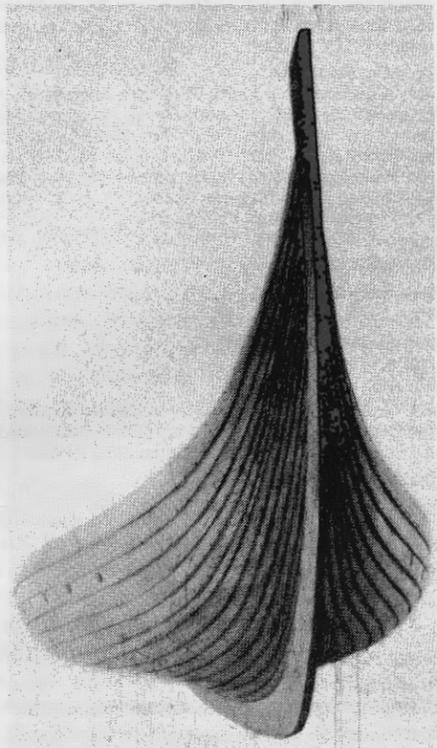
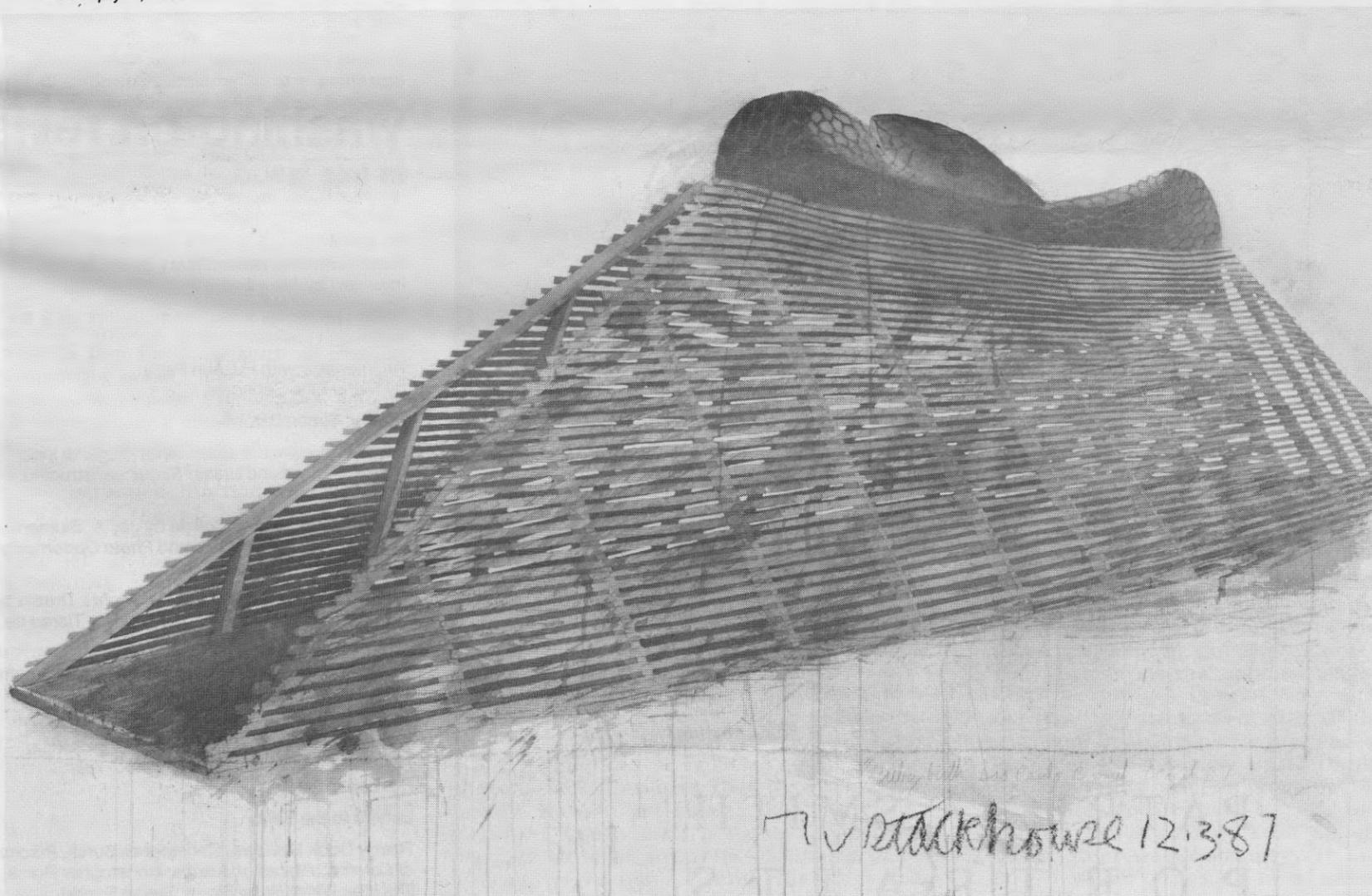
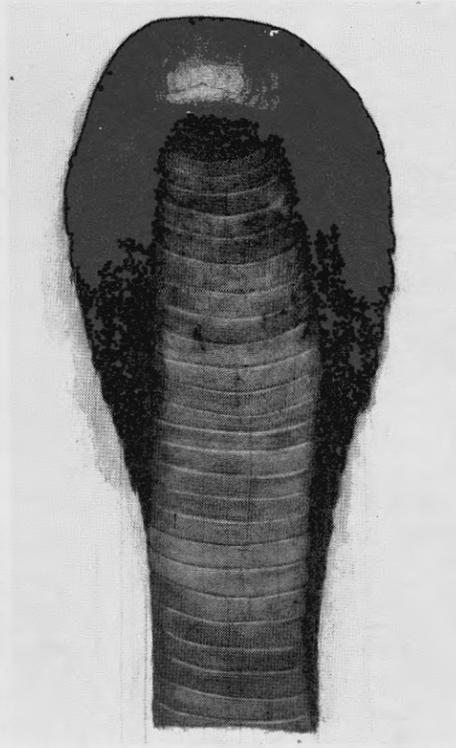
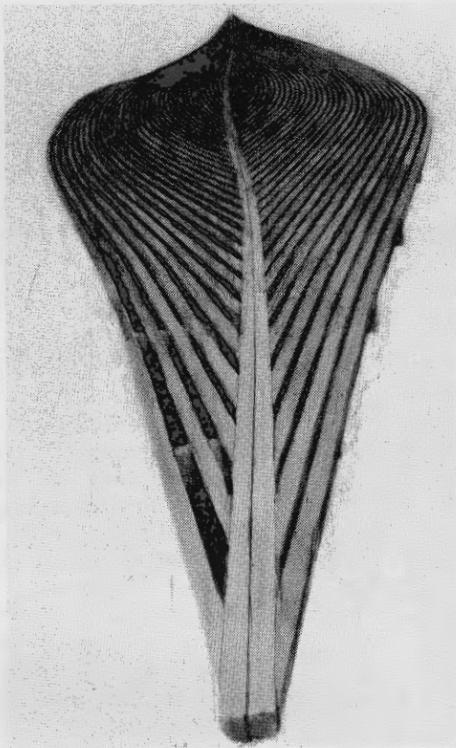


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Blue Triptych, 1988



Ruby Birth, 1987

Paintings by Robert Stackhouse

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left to right: Cynthia Oliver, Chuck Finlon, Karen Graham, Heidi Michel, and Valda Setterfield; lying: Scott Cunningham
Photo: Andrew Eccles

United States constructed by David Gordon and featuring the Pick-Up Company. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC. September 19-22, 1989

THE MYTHS and beauties of the USA are source material for David Gordon's epic construction, *United States*. In fact, the five-part piece is practically overloaded with sources, beginning with how the project got funded: Four regional sponsors (New York, Minnesota, California and New England) co-commissioned it, and all of these geographical areas are referred to in the piece. During the course of its development, *United States* attracted a congress of dance presenters representing 15 states and DC. The complete program, two evenings long, had its debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and came to the Kennedy Center this fall.

In less ingenious hands, this assemblage of text, music, visuals and movement could have come to nothing but heaps of stylish, random nonsense. With Gordon in control, there was little chance this would happen, since multiplicity is his main game, and he is terrific at what he does.

What he does, though, is not to be called "choreography," as he will tell you. He prefers to be called a "constructor" over a choreographer. A veteran of the famous Judson and Grand Union collectives of the sixties and early seventies, he is one of the central artists who contributed to post-Modernist theories in dance, and his compositions are about the process of invention on which postmodernism is based.

His group of performers, the Pick Up Company, has been to Washington only two other times, both performances memorable for lots of reasons. The dancers talked to the audience, offering up bits of gossip, puns, hints at their own biographies. They moved around, too, in broken and replayed patterns requiring a relaxed, second-nature execution. What they did was true and funny and a little mysterious all at once, and though Gordon toyed with notions of sincerity in performance, he gave the audience moments of himself, a sense of his private ironic vision. In those earlier presentations, the company members seemed like a family of old friends up there on the stage.

Their easy good will and casual onstage commentary, the bits of biography and witty talk threaded through the movement were conceived for smaller spaces. Many of the old dancers are gone—Alan Kriegsman, in his review of *United States* in the *Post*, noted that only Gordon and his wife Valda Setterfield, still have this rapport—but luckily, what is lost in intimacy is made up for by the strength of Gordon's interests, his vision, and although the second evenings' sections wander away a little more, most of *United States* is fascinating.

Even with the ambitiousness of the material he uses -- a collection that includes an interview about writing with Robert Frost, music from pop to Mozart, memoirs of strangers, weather reports and other broadcasts, etc., etc., Gordon never loses himself. He gives impressions

of American things with an eye toward connections, not just of the shared sensibilities of citizens, but his own private ones. Logical replay of movement, multiple viewpoints, literacy-to-perfection, the fun and mythology of popular culture are trademarks of his work. Throughout *United States* he keeps his thinking, so that, in the end, through all the regional topics—random city crime, freaks of nature, guilty behavior, order and comfort, the effects of permanent changes—the audience knows they have looked into how Gordon places himself, in the midst of the geography, the center of the storm, on the rooftop.

—ANNE PIERCE