

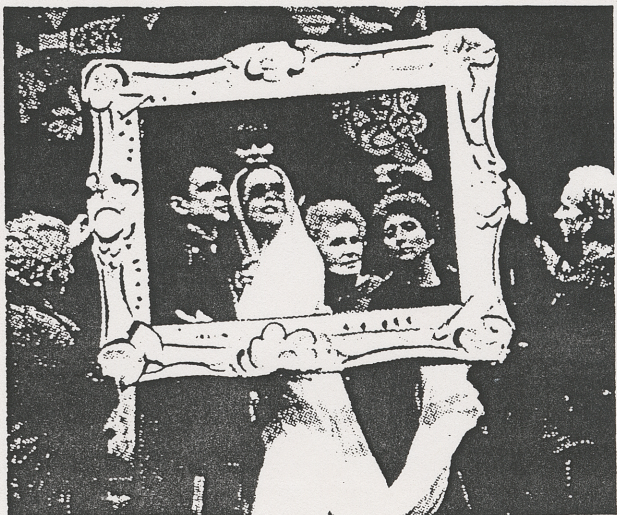
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TIME

THEATER

Framed, but Is It Art?

Marcel Duchamp, the French Surrealist, labeled as “art” a battered bottle rack, a defaced poster of the *Mona Lisa* and a mass-produced urinal. He perceived art all around in the vernacular world. The question pondered in **THE MYSTERIES**, a multimedia enchantment at Harvard’s American Repertory Theater, is whether vernacular life itself—the life of mating, domestic squabbles and old age—can constitute a sort of art. At times the idea is posed literally, as when writer-director David Gordon places an ornate frame around actors engaged in a mock wedding. At other times the “mysteries” of creation are interspersed with the mysteries of, say, detective stories. The text is often witty, if declamatory, but the real joys of the piece are acoustic and visual. Philip Glass has contributed his customary pulsating music, which has the narcotic effect of nitrous oxide* coupled with the distant hum of a dentist’s drill, yet is curiously pleasurable. Painter Red Grooms has designed the sets in a sort of Chagall-meets-Grandma Moses style that is, fittingly, both primitive and highly sophisticated. —W.A.H. III



JACK VARTOOGIAN

* Laughing Gas