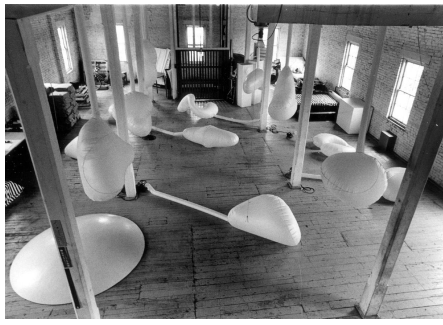


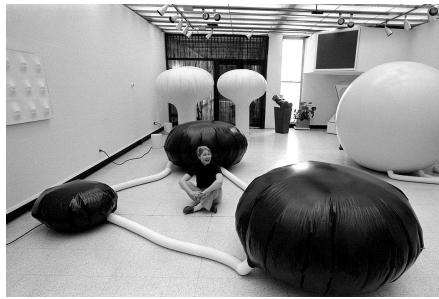
Betty Collings and 'To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89'

by Dan Munn

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Betty Collings' *Anolatabulata* studio installation, 1975. Courtesy of the artist.



Betty Collings at her MFA thesis exhibition *Alternative Experience with Form*, 1973. She sits in the center of *Hearts*, c. 30" x c. 6'x6', polyethelene cells with blower, stethoscope and pipe. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.



Exhibition catalogue for *Triple Helix* at Lancaster Gallery for the Visual Arts, Ohio University, September, 1983, showing Collings' *Red Plume*, 1982, acrylic on vinyl and canvas. 2'x10'x2'. Public Education, Promotion and Research - Cultural Interchange: Visitors To New Zealand From Overseas - Betty Collings, R20589281, AANV 7744 W4445 191/ 4/13/42. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington, New Zealand.



Installation view of *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex*, 1968–89 at the Wexner Center for the Arts. From left to right: Betty Collings, *Dance*, 1975–76; Elizabeth Murray, *Traveler's Dream*, 1978; Robert J. Stull, *Songhai*, 1978. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



Richard Tuttle with Betty Collings installing his solo exhibition alongside University Gallery of Fine Art staff in Ohio State's Hopkins Hall Gallery, 1977. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

The current exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University (OSU), To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex,

1968–89, on from 5 February – 8 May 2022, showcases a staggering selection of works by major contemporary artists, acquired by the university between 1968 and 1989. Featuring works by Lynda Benglis, Robert Smithson, Heidi Glück and many other leading contemporary American artists, the exhibition looks back to a significant period of collecting in OSU's history.

Behind it all was Aotearoa artist and curator Betty Collings, Director of the OSU Gallery of Fine Art from 1974–1980. In this piece, writer Dan Munn looks back to Collings' Directorship at OSU and her own long-running artistic practice; and the connections she forged for contemporary Aotearoa artists in the United States, including in the New York art scene. Underpinned by a commitment to interdisciplinarity, student engagement and a dedication to the contemporary that pushed the boundaries of collecting and curating at OSU, Collings' influence threads through To Begin, Again and the legacy of the university collection.

In the late 70s, The Ohio State University (OSU) acquired a nationally significant collection of works by some of the foremost artists of the time, including Vito Acconci, Lynda Benglis, Mel Bochner, Agnes Denes, Sam Gilliam, Heidi Gluck, Eva Hesse, Sol LeWitt, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Smithson, Frank Stella, Richard Tuttle, Woody and Steina Vasulka and Ruth Vollmer. Many of the artists represented in the collection mounted solo exhibitions, performances and talks on campus alongside acclaimed exhibitions featuring local artists.^{[01] [02]} Major contemporary critics such as Lawrence Alloway, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Rosalind Krauss, Donald Kuspit and Leo Steinberg were invited to speak and visit with local practitioners in their studios, with the aim of giving students, "the confidence to present their ideas within the national argument."^[03] Behind this artistic renaissance was New Zealand ex-pat Betty Collings.

An artist and curator, Collings was Director of the OSU Gallery of Fine Art from 1974 to 1980. "I perceived a need for a faculty exhibition, a graduate student exhibition, also an undergraduate exhibition. I also saw that the art education and art history people had certain intellectual requirements and so in terms of filling a

vacuum, yes; I shaped the way things would go.”^[04] The collection Collings forged was expanded further under the directorship of Jonathan Green, and in 1985 its approximately 3,000 objects were transferred to the care of the newly formed Wexner Center for the Arts. While the Wex was and is a non-collecting institution, *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89*, on view from 5 February–8 May 2022, shines a light on what current curator Daniel Marcus describes as a “pivotal era in the cultural life of the university—one that set the mould from which the Wex was eventually cast.”^[05] Over a hundred works are presented alongside correspondence, notes and calendar entries from Collings’s archive.

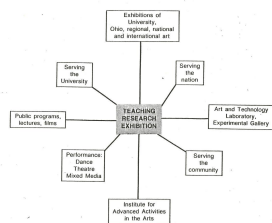


Diagram illustrating the core functions and departments of the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, c.1985. Courtesy of the Wexner Center for the Arts archives.



Richard Tuttle with Betty Collings installing his solo exhibition alongside University Gallery of Fine Art staff in Ohio State’s Hopkins Hall Gallery, 1977. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.



Ann Fessler's *Rape: A Crime Report*, 1984 (foreground), from installation view of *RAPE*, The Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, November 13–December 13, 1985. Image courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.



Eva Hesse, *Area*, 1968. Rubber latex on mesh and wire, 50 x 129 x 36 in. The Collection of the Ohio State University. Courtesy of the Wexner Center for the Arts ©The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser and Wirth.



Elizabeth Murray speaking to students on the occasion of the exhibition *Elizabeth Murray Paintings*, The Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, January 17–31, 1978 © Estate of Elizabeth Murray/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Image courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

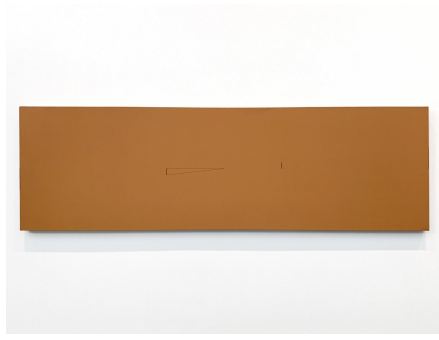
Purchased with the assistance of matching grants from the National Endowment for the Arts under its Museum Purchase Plan, which supported acquisitions from living American artists, the collection showcases traditional art objects alongside documentation of performance and process-based art and experimental digital and video works. Some of the earliest video works by Steina and Woody Vasulka, who founded The Kitchen in New York, are presented. By creating moving image with modulators, video synthesisers, keyers and sequencers, they were able to “isolate the elements of a visual vocabulary and build syntax specific to electronic images,”^[06] yet the artists also incorporated lively urban recordings and brought a soulful musicality to the abstract by lines and forms they crafted. Screening nearby is Lynda Benglis’ first colour videotape, the brilliantly reflexive *Now* (1973), in which the artist performs the roles of director, narrator and star. Superimposing multiple takes so that she appears to lick and kiss herself, Benglis obscures her methods of production in a haze of VHS deterioration. Robert Smithson, who popularised the concept of entropy within the discussion of art, dumped twenty truckloads of earth onto an abandoned building at the nearby Kent State University to create *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), presented in the exhibition by way of photographs taken several years later that capture the effects of time. In a 1972 interview discussing his upcoming lecture at OSU’s interdisciplinary conference “Symposium on the Visual and Performing Arts in Higher Education”, Smithson described art education as a vacuum, where the student “gets his colour course, and he gets his design course and painting course.” He suggests that scholars of art should stop looking to galleries and instead get their hands dirty with “actual production.”^[07]

Heidi Glück’s minimalist acrylic and ink on canvas work *Untitled* (1977), an engagement in what Smithson regarded as an “outmoded craft,”^[08] is nonetheless a sublime exercise in seeing. A set of vertical lines—two shorter near the centre of the largely empty canvas and two longer along the left and right edges—comprise the component parts of the perspectival plane. In 1982–83 Collings curated the exhibition and symposia *Aspects of Perception* for Virginia Commonwealth University and Bard College, bringing together “visual artists and cognitive scientists in an open forum

to consider the role of the visual in perception.”^[09] Glück’s work was noted in the accompanying publication as being illustrative of the “mental gymnastics”^[10] required from the art viewer: its fragmented composition and three-dimensional surface necessitate the use of short-term memory in grasping its complete image, for instance. Working these perceptual muscles even harder is Agnes Denes’ monumental work on paper *Pascal's Triangle, Drawing No. 3 from Pyramid Series* (1973-75) which, at 16 feet long, must be traversed to be viewed in its entirety. The way the artist has chosen to present the mathematical array^[11] for which the work is named highlights the length of each painstakingly hand-drafted number: the lines of numerals crowd near the triangle’s base, causing its sides to curve. Denes sees her work as research in a visual form,^[12] but the work’s size and fragility, and its presentation in a display case rather than a frame, make it the most excessively luxurious (and least mobile) form for mathematics output ever created. It’s a labour of love worth travelling for.



Installation view of *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89* at the Wexner Center for the Arts. From left to right: Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970; Agnes Denes, *Pascal's Triangle, Drawing No. 3 from Pyramid Series*, 1973–75; Dennis Oppenheim, *Identity Stretch*, 1975; Ruth Vollmer, *Trigonal Volume*, 1968. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



Heidi Glück, *Untitled*, 1977. Acrylic and ink on canvas, 25 1/2 x 84 x 1 1/2 inches, on view in *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89* at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



Joan Brown, *Woman Preparing for a Shower*, 1975. Enamel on canvas, 84 x 72 in. Courtesy of di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



Installation view of *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89* at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Centre: William Ramage, *Empirical Study II*, 1979. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



Frank Stella, *Puerto Rican Blue Pigeon*, 1976. Lacquer and oil on metal, 112 1/8 x 155 5/8 x 24 in. Collection of The Ohio State University, Courtesy of the Wexner Center for the Arts Purchased with assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts. Photo: Stephen Takacs.

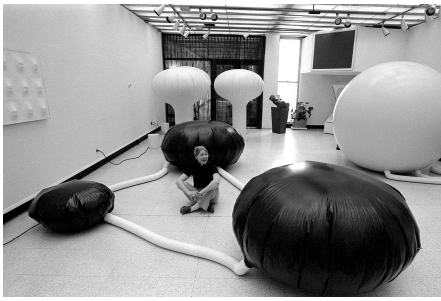


Robert J. Stull, *Songhai*, 1978. Mixed media, 96 x 60 in. Frank W. Hale, Jr. Black Cultural Center / Office of Diversity and Inclusion, The Ohio State University. Photo: Stephen Takacs.

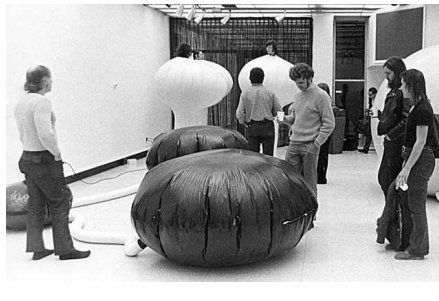
Born in 1934 in Whanganui, New Zealand, Betty Collings came to art first through pottery, taking a ceramics class in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington in 1961 with her husband, materials scientist Dr Edward Collings. Upon moving to the United States the following year, they built a studio in their home in Pennsylvania, where Collings taught herself to throw and glaze. She co-founded the Hogan Gallery, a co-op space for craft works, with students of Paulus Berenson at Swarthmore College, before moving to Ohio in

1967. After completing her bachelors and masters degrees at Ohio State University, she won an appointment as Director of the OSU Gallery of Fine Art. The role built on her experience organising in grassroots art spaces and working in a number of administrative positions (including one at Victoria University in Wellington). In the wake of anti-war riots that shuttered the campus in May of 1970,^[13] her hire as a recent graduate was also emblematic of the university's desire to chart a new direction.^[14] Quickly establishing a robust program of exhibitions, residencies, lectures and workshops, she also conceptualised and assembled a Permanent Collection Advisory Board, comprising administrative staff from the Fine Art, Art History and Art Education departments.^[15] It included Robert Pincus-Witten, the New York art critic and historian who coined the term “Post-minimalism,” brought on as an independent consultant. Taking advantage of inroads made by the interdisciplinary education of the sixties, and channelling the post-minimalist desire to enter a dialogue with new disciplines through a demystification of the artistic process, Collings sought buy-in from across the university. During her years as Director, she saw more interest in the gallery's activities from faculty and students of departments such as philosophy and mathematics than ever before.

Nearly five decades later, the Wex serves as the university's “multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art.”^[16] In his catalogue essay “What is a Laboratory?” art-historian Julian Myers-Szupinska writes that one can read [the metaphor of the laboratory]...as validating the arts within the terms of a research university that sees science and industry as the measure of other, ‘softer’ disciplines.” Looking at how the term has been applied to art over the past century, he contrasts the social laboratory of civic engagement with the formal laboratory of the modern avant garde in order to consider which publics the museum serves. Who is the gallery for and how might these ideas cross-pollinate with other disciplines? In 1976 Collings wrote to Rosalind Krauss, “I see this as a chance... for the visual to stand on its own, to be looked at in relation to other modes of thinking... I'm very curious—maybe the art won't stand up.”^[17]



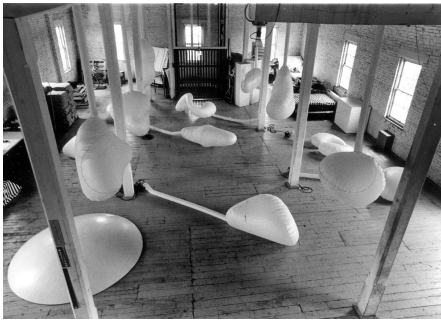
Betty Collings at her MFA thesis exhibition *Alternative Experience with Form*, 1973. She sits in the center of *Hearts*, c. 30" x c. 6'x6', polyethylene cells with blower, stethoscope and pipe. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.



Alternative Experience with Form, installation view of MFA Thesis installation, 1973, featuring *Hearts*. c. 30" x c. 6'x6'. Polyethylene cells with blower, stethoscope and pipe.



Alternative Experience with Form, installation view of MFA Thesis installation, 1973. Featuring clockwise from left: *Triple Form Identification*; *Environment 1*; *Sphere*; *Hearts*. (Solo), 1974.



Betty Collings' *Anolatabulata* studio installation, 1975. Courtesy of the artist.



Collings installing forms from the *Anolatabulata* series at the New Gallery, Cleveland, 1976.

At her own graduate exhibition, Collings presented figurative sculptures alongside interactive inflatable environments. In *Hearts* (1973), "two ellipsoidal pods [were] connected with extended stethoscopes, so that the occupants of each pod simultaneously listen to each other's heart beat... a projection into another body using only auditory clues."^[18] Inflatable spaces that "tested new forms of coexistence"^[19] had entered architectural conversation, and Collings' works used loosely geometric support structures to foreground the act of engaging with artwork and other viewers. Building on this work, she developed discrete (non-participatory) sculptural sets, first attached to blower fans, and then in 1976 in "clear vinyl, seamed with a di-electric welder and blown as tight as a bicycle tire."^[20] Each work comprised a pair (or pairs) of mismatched vinyl panels, the interaction between the two flat surfaces once welded together causing the resulting form to bend or twist.

Three years later, Collings mounted her first solo exhibition in New York, *Drawing on Sculpture*. At Bertha Urdang Gallery, she

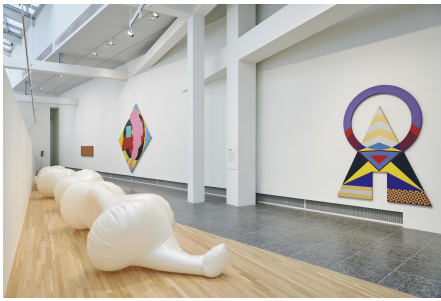
presented works from her *Anolatabulata*^[21] and *Con(jug)ate* series.^[2]

^{21]} The artist's drawings, composed of dots, dashes and simple geometric symbols, were devised in part to help herself to understand the finished forms. Indexing individual forms and entire sets, they function "both as documentation lingering after the installation is dismantled, and as an end product or logical consequence of the sculpture itself."^[23] Both series were developed in consultation with OSU Professor of Mathematics John Philip Huneke, who described the underlying topological structure for each from an initial set of vinyl forms made by the artist, allowing her to comprehensively index all "morphologically distinct" forms meeting that shared set of constraints. The artist presented further solo exhibitions at the gallery in 1980, 1983 and 1989, receiving reviews in *Arts Magazine*, *New York Arts* and *The New York Times*. Roberta Smith wrote of Collings, "Her art has a deliberateness and a variety that frequently escaped her mentors."[[]

^{24]} Collings' ambassadorship for Ohio art and advocacy of art's interdisciplinary relevance was also a key driver in later roles. As Founding Director of The Artists' Organization from 1987 to 2000, she organised exchanges between American creators and artists in Shaanxi Province, People's Republic of China and Kiev, Ukraine. In 1992, she travelled to Kiev to mount a solo exhibition at the Ukraine Union of Artists' Gallery Vistavka and to present her work *Summer Helices* (1974)—which bears the yellow and blue colours of the Ukrainian flag—at the 14th International Cryogenic Engineering Conference and International Cryogenic Materials Conference. She spoke at the "Art and Mathematics" (1993) conference at SUNY Albany, New York and was an Executive Board member of the International Society for Interdisciplinary Study of Symmetry from 1995 to 1999.

In his essay for *Drawing on Sculpture*, Pincus-Witten wrote, "Had she worked in New York she might never have appreciated the full breadth of the epistemic ramifications of her work. The other epistemologists enjoy the 'cushioning' and the possible shrinking effects of 'easy art people and art world reference.'"^[25] However, Collings recalls that Huneke for one "grasped the structure, [but] hardly noticed the forms."^[26] The pleasure and pain of interdisciplinary outputs is that the "objectified works"^[27] are forever tied to their referent. However, while Collings chose to

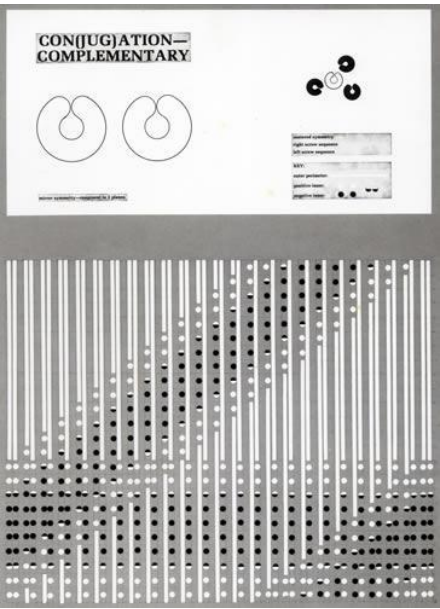
work in vinyl due to its “lack of connotation”^[28] and for its economies of production and display,^[29] the material also allowed misfitting pairs to be forced together, creating complex contorted surfaces that would be hard to anticipate or consider mathematically. The artist’s forty-foot-long *Dance* (1975), on loan for *To Begin, Again*, is installed directly across from the painting *Traveler’s Dream* (1978) by Elizabeth Murray. Murray created her works by cutting shapes out of sheets of draft paper with a razor blade and fitting these shapes, like dress patterns, over pieces of plywood.^[30] She then recreated each draped contour in a single colour of paint. While Murray inserts pattern-making—one of a number of domestic technologies introduced during the decade within feminist art practices—into the conventions of modernist painting, Collings’ design process allows her to offer up singular forms within an interdisciplinary dialogue.



Installation view of *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89* at the Wexner Center for the Arts. From left to right: Betty Collings, *Dance, 1975–76*; Elizabeth Murray, *Traveler's Dream, 1978*; Robert J. Stull, *Songhai, 1978*. Photo: Stephen Takacs.



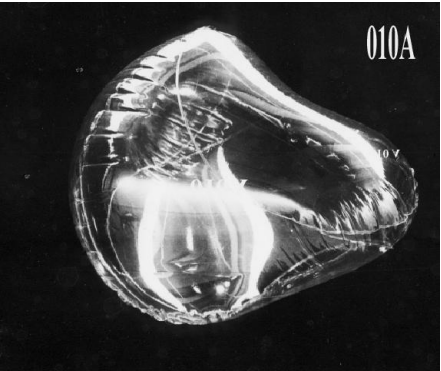
Exhibition catalogue for *Triple Helix* at Lancaster Gallery for the Visual Arts, Ohio University, September, 1983, showing Collings' *Red Plume, 1982*, acrylic on vinyl and canvas. 2'x10'x2'. Public Education, Promotion and Research - Cultural Interchange: Visitors To New Zealand From Overseas - Betty Collings, R20589281, AANV 7744 W4445 191/ 4/13/42. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington, New Zealand.



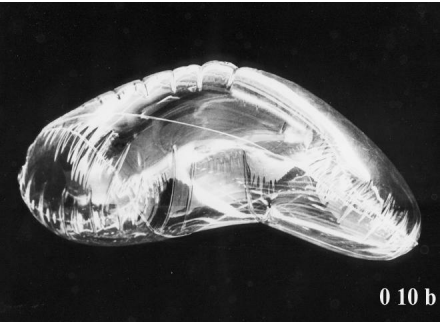
Betty Collings, *Con(jug)ation 3: Mirror symmetric forms*; congruent in either plane, produce forms with centered symmetry in a sequence of forms with right screw followed by a mirror sequence of forms with left screw. Paper tape and dots on cardboard, 12 of 12. Exhibited in *10 from the File*, Columbus Gallery of Fine Art, Columbus, Ohio. Jan 1977.



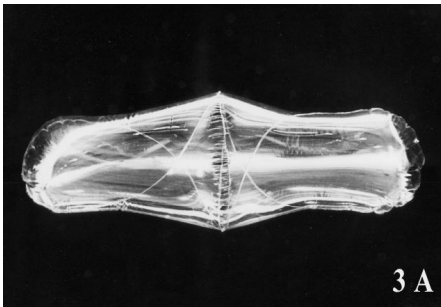
Betty Collings, *Con(jug)ate 3, 1977*. Clear vinyl. 12 pieces, each app. 2'x3'x2' in *10 from the File* curated by Lawrence Alloway for the Columbus Museum of Art in 1977.



Betty Collings, *Anolatabulata 010a, 1979*. Photograph. Exhibited as part of *Drawing on Sculpture*, Beth Urdang Gallery, Boston, 1979.



Betty Collings, *Anolatabulata 010b, 1979*. Photograph. Exhibited as part of *Drawing on Sculpture*, Beth Urdang Gallery, Boston, 1979.



Betty Collings, *Anolatabulata 3a, 1979*. Photograph. Exhibited as part of *Drawing on Sculpture*, Beth Urdang Gallery, Boston, 1979.

While her own work has not yet been exhibited widely in New Zealand, Collings was a founding member and trustee of the New Zealand-United States Arts Foundation. When she travelled to New Zealand in 1983 to gauge interest in US presentations, she had found a consensus among museum professionals and curators that "focused, targeted exhibitions...of a few related artists...would be more effective than a survey exhibition."^[31] In the lead up to the landmark exhibition *Te Māori* (1984) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council wrote to ask if she might assist James Ross in organising a group exhibition of New Zealand artists by using her "contacts with influential critics to their advantage."^[32] Collings insists that she "didn't do much except ask Ileana Sonnabend if she would participate" but suggests that the dealer was "so influential that her involvement was probably—stress probably—the reason other galleries joined in,"^[33] and a dozen solo and group satellite exhibitions featuring New Zealand artists were held,^[34] including presentations by Gretchen Albrecht, Billy Apple, Stephen Bambury, Bruce Barber, Philippa Blair, Gavin Chilcott, Neil Dawson, Claire Ferguson, Max Gimblett, Jeffery Harris, Richard Killeen, Len Lye, Piera McArthur, James Ross, Philip Truttum and Denys Watkins.^[35]

Betty Collings built a place for contemporary art at OSU by working to expand the set of disciplines to which art could speak on campus. Her wide-ranging interests across hard and soft sciences invited new perspectives and new participants to the field as both producers and interpreters, and initiated a series of creative exchanges that continue to resonate today in interdisciplinary initiatives at the Wex such as *400Forward* and *On Possibility: Social Change and the Arts + Humanities*. In the catalogue foreword, Co-Interim Executive Directors Megan Cavanaugh and Kelly Stevelt write that *To Begin, Again* "helps guide the way to our future, as we continue to center community service and collective care in all that we do at the Wex."^[36] Reflective of the art of its time, Collings' programs sought relevance, "not merely as adornments of serious academic activities, but as substantive and integral elements in those activities."^[37] As unionising staff members from across departments at the Wexner Center for the Arts credit LaToya Ruby Frazier's exhibition *The Last Cruze* and the retrospective *Jul*

ia Reichert: 50 Years in Film for emboldening their action,^[38] the organisation's history provides a key to answering the question: What kind of care does today's art demand?

Footnotes

01. Several artists whose works are not included in the collection also mounted exhibitions, including Siah Armajani, John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Will Insley, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg. See Betty Collings, Departmental report, January 24, 1980. The Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio

02. Curator and New Museum Founding Director Marcia Tucker credits Collings with initiating the "Ohio dialog" that led to exhibitions such as *Outside New York: The State of Ohio* (1980). By establishing a "fine small collection of national significance," exhibition curator Alan Schwartzmann writes, she provided "area artists with a continually altering perspective on art from other places." See Allan Schwartzman, *Outside New York: The State of Ohio* (New York, New York: New Museum, 1980), 3, 11. [Link](#)

03. Betty Collings, Departmental report, Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, Expansion of Concepts and Programs, July 1977. The Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio

04. Ray Thorburn, "Ray Thorburn talks with Betty Collings in her studio, March 19, 1980," *Columbus Art: the journal of the Columbus Art League*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (June, 1980). [Link](#)

05. Daniel Marcus, *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex, 1968–89*. (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2022), Exhibition guide. [Link](#)

06. The Daniel Langlois Foundation Collection, *Steina and Woody Vasulka fonds* (Montreal, Quebec: Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, 2003). [Link](#)

07. "Art [education] is in no way connected with any of the other disciplines, you know, any of the other ranges of activity. It's all sort of this closed-off, you know, vacuum kind of thing, where the student is neutralized. And he gets his color course, and he gets his design course and painting course. And these strike me as sort of outmoded crafts...They should open it up. This thing in Ohio...I think will approach that. I think there should be a more direct—I mean, there should be a kind of dialectic between the surrounding industries and the universities, and that the students should just stop looking to galleries and get involved with the actual production." See Robert Smithson, interview with Paul Cummings, July 14, 19, 1972. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. [Link](#)

08. Ibid.

09. Betty Collings, *Aspects of Perception: Art and Cognitive Science* (Richmond, Virginia: Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1982), 28. [Link](#)

10. Collings, *Aspects of Perception*

11. In much of the Western world the array is named after French mathematician Blaise Pascal, however other mathematicians studied it centuries before him in India, Persia, China (including Yang Hui), Germany and Italy. W. L. Hosch, "Pascal's triangle." Encyclopaedia Britannica, February 24, 2013. [Link](#)

12. Agnes Denes, "Agnes Denes on the Place of Pyramids in Environmental Art," Art in America, May 8, 2020. [Link](#)

13. These protests are documented in the photographs of artist Michael Keyes on view. See Mark Ferencsik, "OSU Turmoil of 1969-70 Remembered." The Columbus Dispatch, October 5, 2017. [Link](#)

14. Daniel Marcus, *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex*, 1968–89. (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, February 4, 2022), Press release. [Link](#)

15. "Spearheaded by my requests and plans, it was determined in the summer of 1975 to concentrate upon the acquisition of contemporary art...At the time it was anticipated that ten to fifteen years would be needed for the nascent collection to mature...In fact in less than five years we can point to an exhibition program and a nucleus Contemporary Collection which contribute in a unique and exemplary fashion to national fine arts' discourse." Other board members included Andrew J. Broekema (Dean of Fine Art), Roberts J. Stull (Art Department Chair), Franklin M. Ludden (History of Art Chair), Kenneth Marantz (Art Education Chair), Dr. Edward Q. Moulton (Chancellor, Ohio Board of Regents and Executive Vice-President, The Ohio State University). See Collings, Departmental report.

16. Mission Statement, Wexner Center for the Arts. [Link](#)

17. Betty Collings, letter to Rosalind Krauss, October 13, 1976, 2, Wexner Center for the Arts Archive, Columbus, Ohio.

18. Betty Collings, "Observations of a Contemporary Artist" (M.F.A. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1974), 27.

19. nGbK, *Floating Utopias*. (Berlin, Germany: neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK), April 26, 2018), Press release. [Link](#). The inflatable utopian spaces of the 1960s were designed as a subversion of modernist aesthetics and ideals. See Burcu Eryilmaz, *Architecture as a Discursive Discipline: Inflatable Spaces of Radical Avant-Gardes* (Ankara, Turkey: Middle East Technical University, 2019) and Diana Budds, "Today's Architects Are Obsessed With Inflatable Design—Here's Why," *Fast Company*, February 5, 2017. [Link](#)

20. These works were exhibited at The New Gallery (now the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland), Cleveland, Ohio. See Betty Collings, "Anolatabulata: Early Stages," Artist website, accessed March 14, 2022. [Link](#)

21. When Robert Leonard presented this drawing at Artspace in Auckland as part of *Action Replay: Post Object Arts* (1999), critic Jon Bywater noted that Collings was the only woman included in the exhibition. Describing her forms as "Flintstones dog bones," he commended the work for its "very '90s look," suggesting that it "might well be club decor or design store knick knacks in the same way that much non-minimalism/non-anti-minimalism/non-art/non-furniture can now." See Jon Bywater, "Auckland Roundup," *Log Illustrated*, Issue 6 (Christchurch, NZ: The Physics Room, Summer 1999). [Link](#)

22. No sculptures were shown in this exhibition or in her solo presentation at the gallery in 1980, partly due to space constraints, however the artist's drawings anticipated future installations: "These triangles when cut and assembled as a paired Zeemans Dunce Cap became a model for the time when space and curatorial insight will allow the whole array to be set in full scale three dimensionality." See Betty Collings, "Artist's Statement," *Artists On Art* (Columbus, Ohio: The Artists' Organization, September 1993). [Link](#)

23. Madeleine Burnside, *Preparation and Proposition* (East Islip, NY: Islip Art Museum, 1984), Exhibition catalogue. [Link](#)

24. Roberta Smith, "Could It Be the 70's Again? An Artist Looks Back," *The New York Times*, Section C, 33, December 22, 1989. [Link](#)

25. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Drawing on Sculpture* (New York, New York: Bertha Urdang Gallery, 1979), Exhibition catalogue, 2,4,6. [Link](#)

26. Betty Collings, *Con(jug)ates Explanatory Text*, Artist Website. [Link](#)

27. Pincus-Witten, *Drawing on Sculpture*.

28. "Nobody had any ideas of how [inflatables] ought to be, so you didn't have all the stuff about shining it and polishing it and all that crap that went on in the 60's and early 70's." See Betty Collings, interview by Michael Jones, *Artists on Art*, November 6, 2007 (Columbus, Ohio: The Artists' Organization). [Link](#)

29. "I looked out onto the oval where the architecture students had a huge polyethylene construction - black polyethylene. It was immense, probably a hundred feet by sixty feet blown up by a vacuum cleaner. It was ugly and it was big and I thought God it must only weigh about twenty pounds. That's for me." See Betty Collings, interview.

30. Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," *ARTnews*, September 1984. [Link](#)

31. Betty Collings, letter to Christopher H. Phillips, Chairman of the New Zealand-United States Arts Foundation, August 1983. Public Education, Promotion and Research - Cultural Interchange: Visitors To New Zealand From Overseas - Betty Collings, R20589281, AANV 7744 W4445 191/4/13/42. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington, New Zealand.

32. John McCormack, letter to Betty Collings, April 9, 1984. *Public Education, Promotion and Research*.

33. Betty Collings, email to author, July 23, 2021.

34. The exhibition organised by the Department of Primitive Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art was a vast improvement from the New Zealand pavilion of the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition eighty years earlier in which taonga were presented as agricultural produce and listed in the Timbers section of the catalogue, however no Māori artists were included in the contemporary exhibitions. Ralph Hotere was included in initial plans as part of a two-person exhibition with Claire Ferguson at Gracie Mansion, however, for unknown reasons, the artist appears to have been replaced by James Ross in the final show. The satellite exhibitions as a whole were coordinated by New York-based curator Mary Evangelista with the assistance of the New Zealand United States Arts Foundation and the New Zealand Lamb Company. During the planning stages for this exchange, consultant Margy Sharpe wrote in a letter to foundation chairman Christopher Phillips, "The Maori show that opens at the Metropolitan next year covers that aspect of New Zealand art history." (Emphasis mine). See T. E. Donne, *New Zealand Government catalogue of exhibits at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904* (St. Louis, Missouri: Little & Becker Printing, 1904), 12. [Link](#) and Margy P. Sharpe, letter to Christopher H. Phillips, September 9, 1983. *Public Education, Promotion and Research*.

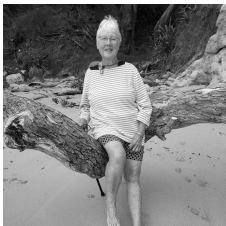
35. Philippa Blair at Shippee Gallery; Billy Apple at Leo Castelli Gallery; Max Gimblett at R.C. Erpf Fine Art Gallery; Philip Trusttum at Kornblee Gallery; Richard Killeen at Bertha Urdang Gallery; Gavin Chilcott at Pam Adler Gallery; Piera McArthur at Armstrong Gallery; Denys Watkins at Germans Van Eck Gallery; Len Lye (films) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Cecile Starr (talk) at Donnell Media Center, New York Public Library; Gretchen Albrecht, Stephen Bambury, Jeffery Harris, Richard Killeen, James Ross and Philip Trusttum in N.Z.N.Y. at 22 Wooster Street Gallery; Claire Ferguson and James Ross at Gracie Mansion (see footnote 32); Bruce Barber at 49th Parallel Gallery; Neil Dawson at City University Graduate Center Mall. See New Zealand Embassy, *New Zealand Update*, Vol. 6 No. 8 (September 1984). [Link](#)

36. Megan Cavanaugh and Kelly Stevelt, *To Begin, Again: A Prehistory of the Wex*, 1968–89. (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2022), Exhibition guide. [Link](#)

37. On hearing of Colling's dismissal, Associate Professor of Philosophy Lee B. Brown wrote to university provost W. Ann Reynolds, "The hope that I express would be that whatever the larger context finally be, there by a significant space left if which someone exactly like Ms. Collings can do precisely what she has been doing...Ms. Collings is one of the catalysts on this campus of the sort of intellectual life without which a university becomes a dusty store-house...I have tried to explain why her policies have been important. They are important, not merely as adornments of serious academic activities, but as substantive and integral elements in those activities." See Lee B. Brown, letter to W. Ann Reynolds, March 20, 1980. Betty Collings Personnel File. The Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

38. Wex Workers United open letter to the leadership of Wexner Center for the Arts, March 4, 2022. [Link](#)

Biographies



Betty Collings is an artist, writer and curator with more than 50 years of professional experience. As a curator, she initiated programs that created opportunities for practicing artists while at the same time enhancing the cultural experience of the community at large. Notable examples include (i) the establishment of "The Hogan" Swarthmore, P.A. one of the first collective artist galleries in the 60's, (ii) her 70's contribution to the development of the Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art and its Collection now housed by the Wexner Center for Visual Arts; (iii) the 80's creation of The Artists Organization (TAO) including the establishment of ArtistsonArt.org; also curating 10 solo exhibitions and *Aspects Of Perception*; (iv) in the late 90's the co-initiation of New Zealand's Mercury Bay Art Escape, an annual studio tour.

As an artist she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Ohio State University in 1970 followed by a Master of Fine Arts in 1974. Activity included lecturing in China and the Ukraine about Ohio artists as well as exhibiting her own work. A well rounded artist with a ceramic studio in New Zealand and a home studio in Ohio, her ceramics, soft and bronze sculpture and acrylic painting have been shown nationally and internationally. Over 25 solo exhibitions include four at the Bertha Urdang Gallery in New York, those at the Islip Museum and at Gallery Vistavaka, Ukraine, and others at numerous regional universities and museums. Additionally she has presented two career retrospectives in Ohio and Kentucky and her work has featured in over 70 regional and international group exhibitions.

Born in Wanganui, New Zealand in 1934, Collings was a member of the New Zealand-United States Arts Foundation from 1981-1989. In 1984 she was presented with the Distinguished Service Award for Contributions to Visual Arts from the Columbus Art League and in 1997 received a Distinguished Service Award for Curation and Managing from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.



Dan Munn is a writer & arts professional based in New York City. His reviews, artist profiles and features have appeared in *Art Asia Pacific*, *Art New Zealand*, *Black Art in America*, *C Magazine*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Le Roy*, *Mousse*, *Randian* and *This is Tomorrow* and in exhibition catalogues and publications for David Roberts Art Foundation, The Moving Museum, Union Pacific, Kunstraum, Minerva, and Bowerbank Ninow. He has lectured at The Architectural Association School of Architecture, LUX Critical Film Forum, Stuart Hall Library at Iniva, Goldsmiths College, and Gasworks and was a grant panelist for Alabama State Council on the Arts. He received his MA in Fine Arts from Goldsmiths College, London, UK.

