Guerrilla Artist at the Met

"Claimed" object.

By Stuart W. Little

My friend Dove Bradshaw is making her way in the art world. Already she has a piece on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in a choice location just outside the entrance to the Treasures of Tutankhamun, where 10,000 art lovers pass by daily. How had this happened? The other day Dove gave away her secret.

Dove has designated the Fire Hose Station at the northwest corner of the Grand Gallery as a work of art—hers. An admirer of Duchamp and his mixed-media presentations of females, she found in the fire hose a counterpart, male principle. After hunting in the Whitney and the Modern, she located the "archetypal" fire hose in the Met.

Dove had a label printed, listing the work by name and materials ("brass, paint, canvas"), which she mounted on the wall behind the backs of the curatorial staff in October 1976. This, she tells me, comes under the category of a "claimed" object of art as distinguished from a "found" object. The label was removed within a week. Those alert guards in the Grand Gallery. Undaunted, she applied another label. The guards redeployed; she counterattacked. "I decided I would make this a life's work," Dove said.

Months elapsed. When Dove next revisited her work, last October, there, intact behind the glass case, was her third label! De facto recognition!

Emboldened, Dove went a step further. She had a postcard of the work printed. When the sales-counter staff at the head of the main staircase wasn't looking, she stuck a bunch in the racks of twentieth-century artists in the company of Monet, Albers, and Pollock. Then she stepped up and bought the first two herself. The unblinking salesperson charged her 27 cents each.

"I stop in nearly once a week to refurbish my rack," Dove said, calculating that 150 cards have been sold in less than two months, though so far all proceeds, including the customary artist's royalty, have gone to the museum.

Dove Bradshaw has had several exhibits of her jewel-like ceramic pieces. Her fine pencil drawings are now showing at the Graham Gallery. Her ultimate goal, however, is open artistic recognition from the Met.