

Bird Land 1989

By Matthew Rose

Some 20 years ago, artist Dove Bradshaw's two ring-neck doves built a nest inside her Cambridge, Massachusetts apartment from bits of wire, thread and hair pulled from her brush. A gift from a friend, they laid several eggs, one which hatched, but at the same time, gave birth to her newest conceptual sculpture, *Plain Air*

Located in the salon living room of West 11th Street art dealer Sandra Gering, are two beige ring-necked mourning doves perched calmly on a bicycle wheel suspended from the ceiling. They are cooing and dropping their droppings on a black and white target on the floor. The birds have moved in. They are the installation. Window panes have been brushed with paint to prevent the birds' misguided flights and the entire gallery has been covered with white cotton canvases.

"Gering said do a show as wild as I could," says Dove Bradshaw. "I thought it would be interesting to do this piece in a more public place." She considered Gering, who runs her own salon gallery, as a critical element to the piece. "It has to do with her and her partner's needs as well as the needs of the birds. The two pigeons are free to come and go at their own will."

In 1969 after given two doves as a gift, Bradshaw opened the cage door to let the birds move about. They walked around; they didn't know yet how to fly and would land on plants and fall. "They didn't have a sense of themselves," says Bradshaw. "But they began to explore the space and one day coming home, I saw a bicycle wheel and mindful of Duchamp, I picked it up and thought it might make an interesting perch if I hung it horizontally, threading a rope through the axis. I would hang it like a chandelier. The birds discovered it once they did learn to fly, spun it around and made it theirs."

Bradshaw as Artistic Adviser to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, has been aligned with the Fluxus movement. She



was the artist who, in 1976 *claimed* the fire hose station at the northwest corner of the Grand Gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with a small placard giving dimensions, materials and artist's name. Bradshaw photographed her work, created postcards and surreptitiously inserted them into the racks in the Museum gift shop. The Museum unwittingly sold 600 of the cards. The artist also investigated the "smiling Sister phenomenon," in 1979, impersonating a subway sister, smiling and not; the difference was a 50% bonus in collections for the happier sister.

Her current work, *Plain Air*, accompanied by silver leaf and liver of sulfur drawings on vellum and a bronze egg sculpture, is for sale for \$10,000, and would be adapted in situ in another place. "Of course," says Bradshaw, "I don't guarantee the life of the birds...it's the idea that is the work."