

Dan Graham New York Times June 2009

Arts&LEISURE

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2009

The New York Times

A Round Peg

Framed by a Retrospective, the Artist Dan Graham Insists That He's Just Playing



By RANDY KENNEDY

ERE'S a good art-world quiz question, one that could stump many an astute insider: What do Sol LeWitt, Sonic Youth, Dean Martin, Mel Brooks, Merle Haggard, Hudson River School painting and midcentiry New Jersey tract housing have in common?

The answer, Dan Graham — a Zelig of so many creative circles over the past four decades it is dizzying to keep track — sat recently sipping an iced tea and eavesdropping on conversations at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where a retrospective of his work opened Thursday, finally adding him to the ranks of conceptual art's thorny 1960s pioneers rereceive a full-blown American career survey. (The show, organized with the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, began there and travels to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis after it closes in New York on Oct. 11.)

Among his conceptual peers, those who set out to wrest art from the realm of objects and move it more fully into one of ideas, Mr. Graham, of, is someone whose work does not come easily to mind even for an informed artgoing public. In part this is because his restless intellect has never allowed him to settle into anything resembling a signature style or to be easily categorized. (Most attempts at categorization are parried by Mr. Graham himself with a professorial annoyance and feneer's agility, and he dislikes being called a conceptual artist and says he is not a professional one in any sense, calling art

If the world had nothing else for which to thank him, it might be enough that during a brief stint as a dealer he gave LeWitt his first solo gallery show, along with presenting early work by Dan Flavin and Donald Judd. Or for the part Mr. Graham played later in the formation of Sonic Youth — he helped Kim Gordon, one of the group's founders, land her first New York apartment in his Lower East Side building and cast her in an all-girl "band" for a 1890s performance piece, jump-starting her music career. When Mr. Graham, rumpled and white-bearded with a kind of Mr. Natural aura, shows up at cutting-edge rock concerts these days, well-

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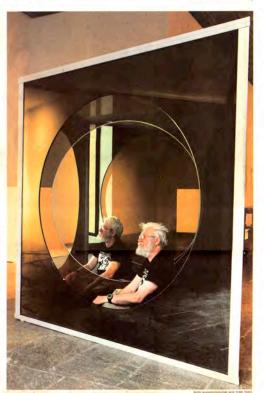
Dan Graham in 1982, photographing his "Two Adjacent Pavilions" at Documenta VII in Germany.
Art, he says, is his "passionate hobby."



Dan Graham **New York Times** June 2009



A Round Peg: Dan Graham's Just Playing







'Artists and musicians knew about me, but I think the work was always too early.'