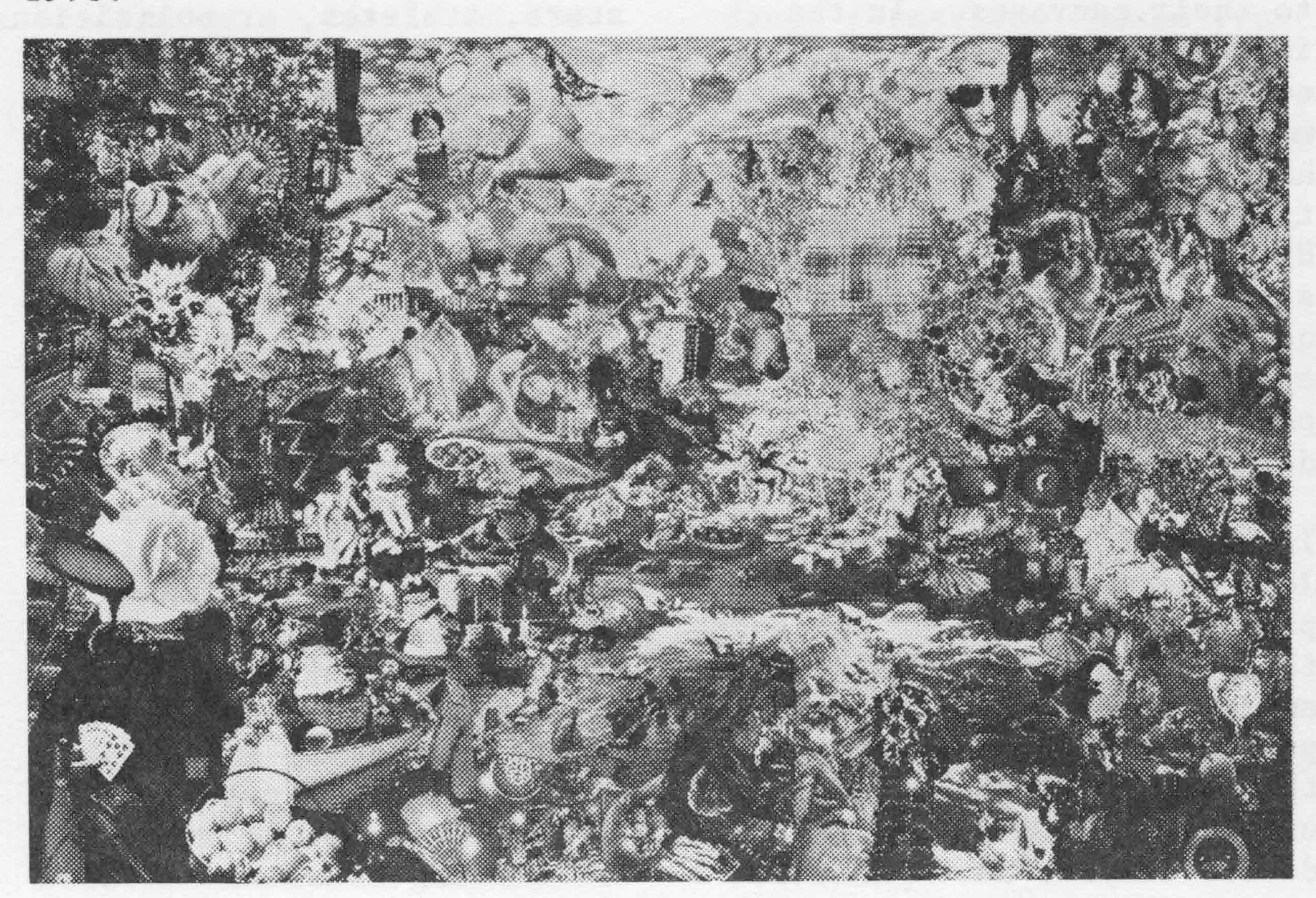
Arkadia's Last Resort; or Fête Champêtre Up Mneosyne Creek, 1976.



Jess calls the four works shown here "paste-ups," uncharacteristically terse descriptions of process only. They are of course examples of the technique of collage, an invention of early 20th century painters who in their dissatisfaction with the continual obligation to make illusions of things chose to physically adhere either photographic reproductions or the actual things themselves to their canvases. In the intervening three-quarters century, collage has attracted many practioners, but few have exploited its possibilities so insistently as Jess. His magnification both of scale and intensity produces collages of epic rather than episodic dimensions, giant phantasmagorias of richly detailed reveries.

In each of these four pieces Jess began with commercially printed landscapes of the sort that decorate furniture stores and motels. Large photographic panoramas of romantic nature, they show a woodlands and creek, a mountain lake, a desert canyon, an expanse of snowy mountains. Spectacular, garish, and patently sentimental, they are nonetheless irrefutably correct representations of the geographic world, framed distillations of an exalted Euclidean space of foreground and background, of physical space as we learn to perceive it. They symbolize reality.

Atop these mural-size photographs Jess arranges thousands of smaller photographically printed fragments in a dense fabric that often includes the underlying scenes. Rescued from the plethora of massproduced images that surround and inundate us daily he weaves together these bits and pieces of book and magazine

illustrations, advertisements, jigsaw puzzle parts, and occasional real objects such as a piece of tapestry, a needle, or some dried flowers. Often whole and always legible, each piece of the mosaic remains distinct. Although it would appear that Jess' powers of visual alchemy could transform anything, there is a noticeable absence of certain contemporary media icons--there are no personalities, movie stars, athletes, or politicians for instance. Similarly, no recognizable landmarks or locales are to be found. His aversion to using images of people and places we think we know suggests how unlike a rebus or roman à clef Jess' compositions are. A rebus-the puzzle where signs and symbols are substituted for words or parts of words-implies analytical organization and thus comprehension. But nothing could be more irrelevant to this work than trying to make literal sense of it. These vertiginous complications and embellishments of the natural world cannot even be seen unless we are willing to abandon social conventions like logic and perspective. We are confronted with a highly developed and figurative universe, one in which imagination, intuition and fancy supersede knowledge, empiricism, and common sense. Against the surrealist insistence on a codified, universal, pyschological scheme, Jess proposes a sustained, interminable wave of free association. Of Jess' paintings the poet Robert Duncan has observed, "All the operations of the visual field are admitted into the intelligence of the painting... The 'rules' of this universe are entirely pictorial, beyond what is visually sensible." While remarkably legible, each fragment of the whole intermingles with its neighbors creating a shimmer of enigma across the work. Jess thus underscores the essential interconnection and oneness of everything and everyone. His mysticism serves him as an aesthetic, it is his style.

In their aspiration to replicate the mind's whirl, Jess' collages resemble evocative poetry. It is somewhat surprising then that he depends so little on the written word in these works. A banner inscribed "E Pluribus Unum" flutters through The Virtue of Incertitude Perplexing Device of Definition. Infinitely expandable, grace-In Midday Forfit Feignting Spell a small scene of elective affinities resonates from the bottom of the picture: a late 50s Chevy station wagon, preceded by a gesticulating wooden stick figure emerges from a lagoon onto a beach of unsuspecting and imperturbable seals. A mysterious pearllike object sits on the car's roof, gemstones act as headlights, and the injunction "ask" serves as hood ornament. As Duncan recommends, improbabilities of this magnitude are best integrated visually, their significance lying wholly in their energy to generate a comparable vortex in the viewer's mind's eye.

Certain leitmotifs do reappear within each collage, and from one to the next. Images of the work of other artists --Cezanne, Renoir, Brancusi-drift in and out. So with quotes from the art of Matisse and Picasso and portraits of the artists themselves. A striking likeness of Picasso appears in a carved African statue near a slightly altered drawing of his; Matisse's face and torso are fashioned from a desert cliff and garbed in his wellknown wire-frame glasses and

cap. A reverence for his métier permeates Jess' work and lends a celebratory air to it. Food and water, hands and their potential for creativity run through Cyrogenic Consideration or Sounding One of the Dilemna-hands holding a stylus, paint brushes, a book, playing musical instruments, praying, gesturing for a dancer's balance, holding other people's hands in a circular folkdance formation. Round fruits, pearls and spherical jewels, glistening dots surface everywhere. The circle is in fact Jess' favored geometry. gully egalitarian, an abbreviation for the cosmos' movement within itself, it seems his most apt metaphor.

Richard Armstrong

Works in MATRIX:

Midday Forfit Feignting Spell, 1971, color paste-up. 50" x 70". Lent by Odyssia Gallery, New York.

The Virtue of Incertitude Perplexing Device of Definition, 1972, color paste-up. 50" x 65 1/2". Lent by Mr. Graham Gund, Massachusetts.

Arkadia's Last Resort; or Fête Champêtre Up Mnemosyne Creek, 1976, color paste-up. 47" x 71". Lent by Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

Cryogenic Consideration: or Sounding One of the Dilemna, 1980, color paste-up. 47 3/4" x 72". Lent by Odyssia Gallery, New York.

Selected one-person exhibitions: Dilexi Gallery, SF '60; Cheney Cowles Museum, Spokane, WA '67 (traveling exhibition under auspices of Western Association of Art Museums); San Francisco Museum of Art '68; Odyssia Gallery, NY '71, '78; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago '72; The Museum of Modern Art, NY '74; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, MATRIX 2: Jess '75; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, TX '77 (traveling exhibition to University Art Museum, Berkeley and Des Moines Art Center, Iowa).

Selected group exhibitions: King Ubu Gallery, SF '53; The Place, SF '54; Pomona College, Claremont, CA '61; The Museum of Modern Art, NY, The Art of Assemblage '61 (traveling exhibition); University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, The Painter and the Photograph '64; The Oakland Museum, CA, Pop Art U.S.A. '63; The Museum of Modern Art, NY, American Collage '65; Gallery Reese Palley, SF, Symbol and Vision '70; The Art Institute of Chicago, Seventieth American Exhibition '72; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Extraordinary Realities '73; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and Pollock Galleries, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Poets of the Cities: New York and San Francisco 1950-65 '74 (also San Francisco Museum of Art and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT '75); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era '76 (also National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA, Narration '76; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA,

Aspects of the 70's: Mavericks '80.

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Duncan, Robert. "An Art of Wondering," <u>Translations</u>, <u>Salvages</u>, <u>Paste-ups by Jess</u> (Dallas, TX: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts '77).

Stiles, Knute. "San
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Jarmusch, Ann. "The Nation: Philadelphia, 'Free Wheeling Diversity.'" Art News, vol. 77, no. 6 (Sept. '78).

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