

Fig. 8 Jay DeFeo, *The Rose*, 1958–66. Oil on canvas, 128 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 92 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 11 in. (327.3 × 234.3 × 27.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of The Jay DeFeo Foundation and purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and the Judith Rothschild Foundation [Inv. N.: 95.170].



periphery is produced by changes in both tone and texture: crisply honed corrugation at the center of the composition cedes to a lumpy tumult of grays and blacks at the edges. DeFeo flecked the work with other colors of paint and sparkling chips of mica. The thick paint surface harbors other materials as well: upon acknowledging that her experiments were pushing the medium of oil paint toward its structural limits, DeFeo began to embed wooden dowels within the paint strata and stuffed newspapers into the cracks that opened up when those attempts at shoring up the thick surface proved insufficient (fig. 10).⁹

In 1965 DeFeo's long production of *The Rose* was halted when the rent for her and Hedrick's apartment dramatically increased, effectively evicting them. By that time, the painting weighed nearly a ton and required a team



Fig. 9 Jay DeFeo working on an early version of *The Rose* (known then as *The White Rose*), at 2322 Fillmore Street, 1960–61. Digital file from negative. The Jay DeFeo Foundation, Berkeley, Calif. [JDF no. R0353].



Fig. 10 Early version of *The Rose* with wooden dowels at 2322 Fillmore Street, 1960s. Gelatin silver print. The Jay DeFeo Foundation, Berkeley, Calif. [JDF no. R0650].



Fig. 13 Wallace Berman, *Jay DeFeo*, 1959. Toned gelatin silver print with transfer type, 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (18.1 × 14.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of the Lannan Foundation [Inv.: 96.243.9].

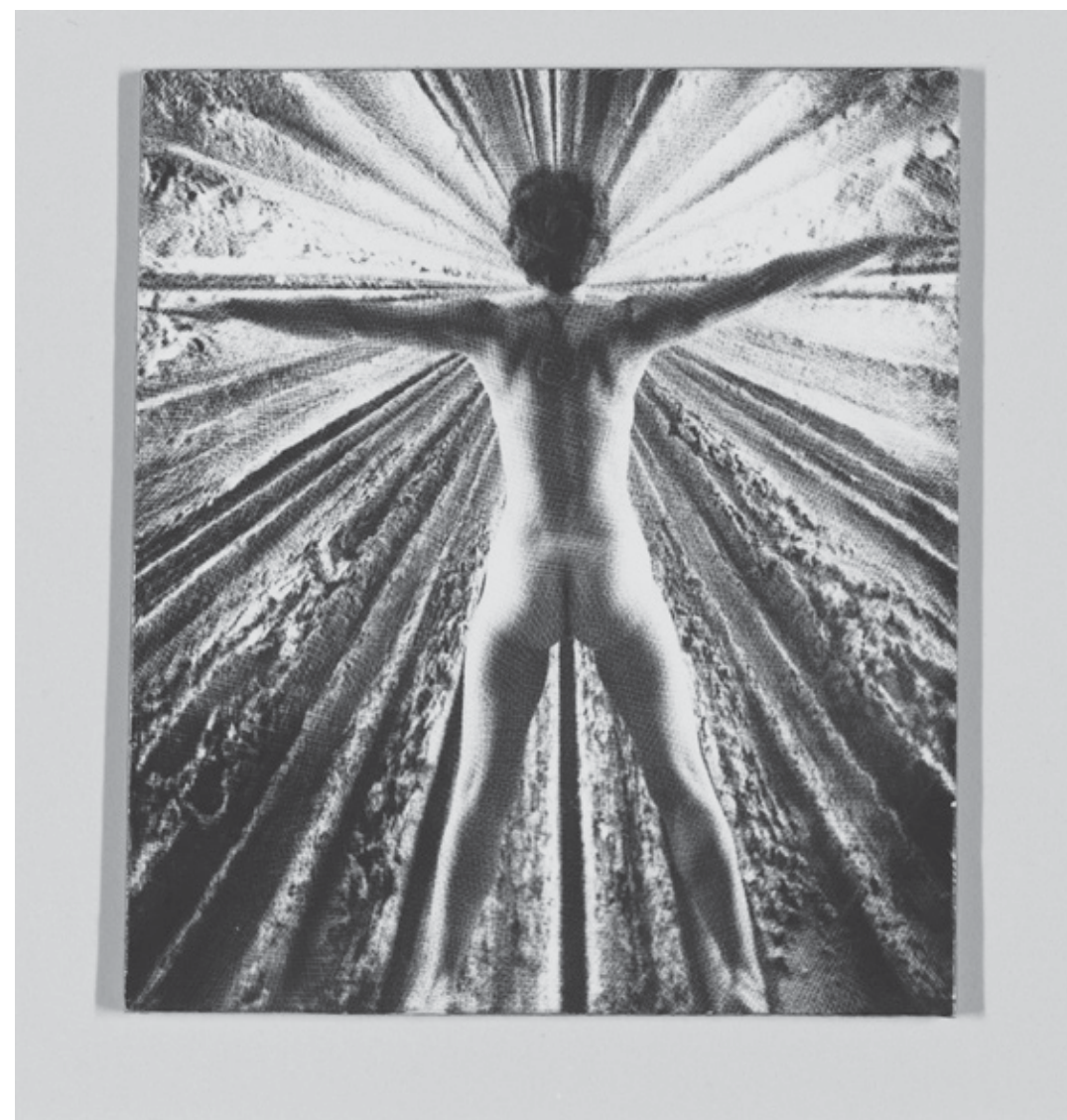
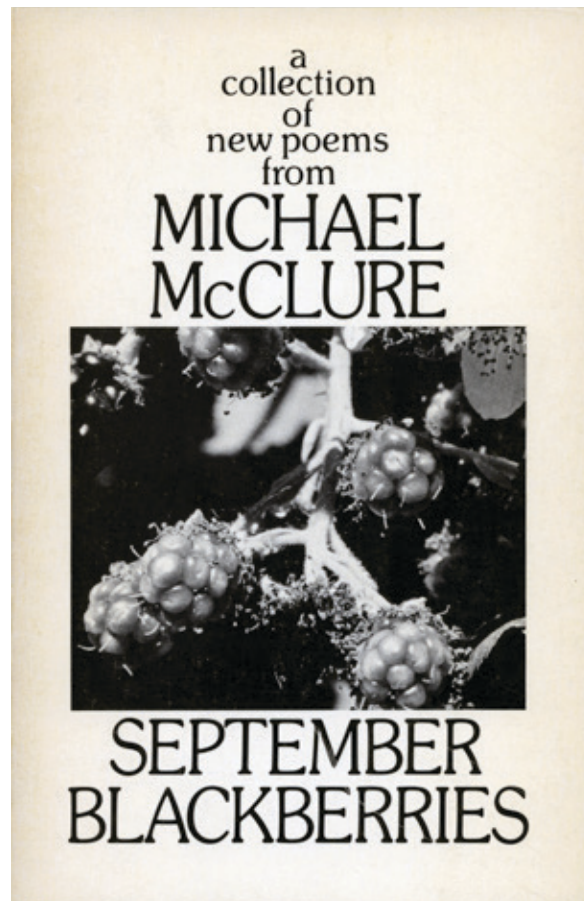


Fig. 14 Wallace Berman, *Jay DeFeo*, 1959. Gelatin silver print, 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (13 × 12.1 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of the Lannan Foundation [Inv.: 96.243.8].

Fig. 60 Photograph by Larry Keenan on the cover of Michael McClure's *September Blackberries* (New York: New Directions, 1974). © Larry Keenan.



of inspiration and desire that pulsed through his community, liberating his friends as it bound them together, to be not only parallel but also entwined. The poem's characterization of a libidinal relationship between McClure and DeFeo indicates that he believed desire helped propel "feedback loops" of inspiration, like the one between his poem and her painting—that the unifying power of the "erotic impulse," the fluidity it cultivates between internal and external, catalyzed an opening of the self and a tending toward the other that enabled artists in their circle to recycle one another's works while mitigating the anxiety of influence. Another member of the Fillmore coterie, Carlos Villa, similarly suggested that romantic feelings for DeFeo contributed to her male friends' attachments to and creation of works about *The Rose*. "I could see," he recalled, "Fred Martin and Bruce Conner having these kinds of, 'Oh, I can't really say how I feel,' . . . unrequited love for this personage [DeFeo]."⁸⁹ The 1965 poem adds McClure to Villa's list.

However, McClure's statement of desire for DeFeo at the end of the poem is notably conflicted. The poem's final line ("TOO MUCH!") has two possible meanings: it could express either the poet's feeling of being overwhelmed by the enormity of his desire or the poet chastising himself for that desire. Either way, as a call for restraint, the exclamation is at odds with



Fig. 61 Jay DeFeo, *September Blackberries*, 1973. Gelatin silver print with ink and paint on paper, 8 × 11 in. (20.3 × 28 cm). Private collection.

his typical celebration of uninhibited sexuality. His friendship with DeFeo, and the fact that they were both married to other people, may have made it uncomfortable for him to admit (and for her to accept) his attraction to her, an uneasiness likely exacerbated by the potentially reductive nature of his account of sexuality, particularly female sexuality. The final line, in short, reads as an admission by McClure that the "feedback loops" of desire and inspiration between bodies, works, and media that helped generate his community and its art were entangled in webs of interpersonal relationship (friendships, marriages, and so on) and identity (gender, sexuality, and so on) that often made their generative, dialogical paths more complex and strained in practice than they were in theory.

COMPLETING THE CIRCUIT

Nearly a decade after McClure wrote his poem about *The Rose*—long after he, DeFeo, and the painting had vacated the Fillmore Street apartment building—he sent her a copy of his poetry collection *September Blackberries* (1974, fig. 60). DeFeo responded by sending him a collage of the same title (fig. 61). "Yeah, I gave Jay *September Blackberries*, my book," McClure recalled in 2015 of the exchange. "And, so, as a return gift, she gave me that little collage hanging on my wall there." The work is one of several photographs, photo collages, and paintings that DeFeo created in the early 1970s that feature her teeth and dental bridge that had to be extracted in 1967 due to periodontal disease.⁹⁰ Three of these works bear the same title as McClure's anthology: the mixed-media work she sent him, a photomontage, and an acrylic painting modeled on the photomontage (figs. 62, 63). All three were created between 1972 and 1973, roughly contemporaneous with McClure's writing of *September Blackberries*, suggesting that the works and poems were created in dialogue with one another. The photomontage in particular seems to confirm this connection (see fig. 62). It overlays a photograph of her pulled teeth atop a photographic detail of *The Rose* that was possibly taken in the context of recent efforts to conserve the painting (which the next chapter will elaborate). The montage not only



Fig. 77 Jay DeFeo, Correspondence for Bruce Conner, c. 1970s. Bruce Conner photograph collection, BANC PIC 1997.069, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Fig. 78 Jay DeFeo, Untitled (for B.C.), 1973. Photo collage on black matboard, 9¾ × 7¾ in. (24.7 × 19.7 cm). Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York.

bag's right side, approximately where it would on a telephone. The collage is a blatant visual pun: it elides objects (bulb and receiver, golf bag and telephone stem) based on their formal resemblance, with utter disregard for function. DeFeo's play with visual resemblances between otherwise unrelated things resonates with prominent avant-garde practices from earlier in the twentieth century.⁷⁸ In this case, the unexpected associations between incongruous elements have a humorous, comical effect, giving the montage a light, amusing tenor.

By dislodging objects from their customary contexts and narratives of use and combining them according to alternative criteria, the collage demonstrates an indicative aspect of play, which Millar describes as "the lack of constraint from conventional ways of handling objects, materials and ideas." The fact that the same objects (telephone, fan, table, light bulb, and so on) reappear in different combinations throughout the series further likens her artistic process to a child's inexhaustible invention of new significations for the worn contents of her toy chest. "A telephone," Conner