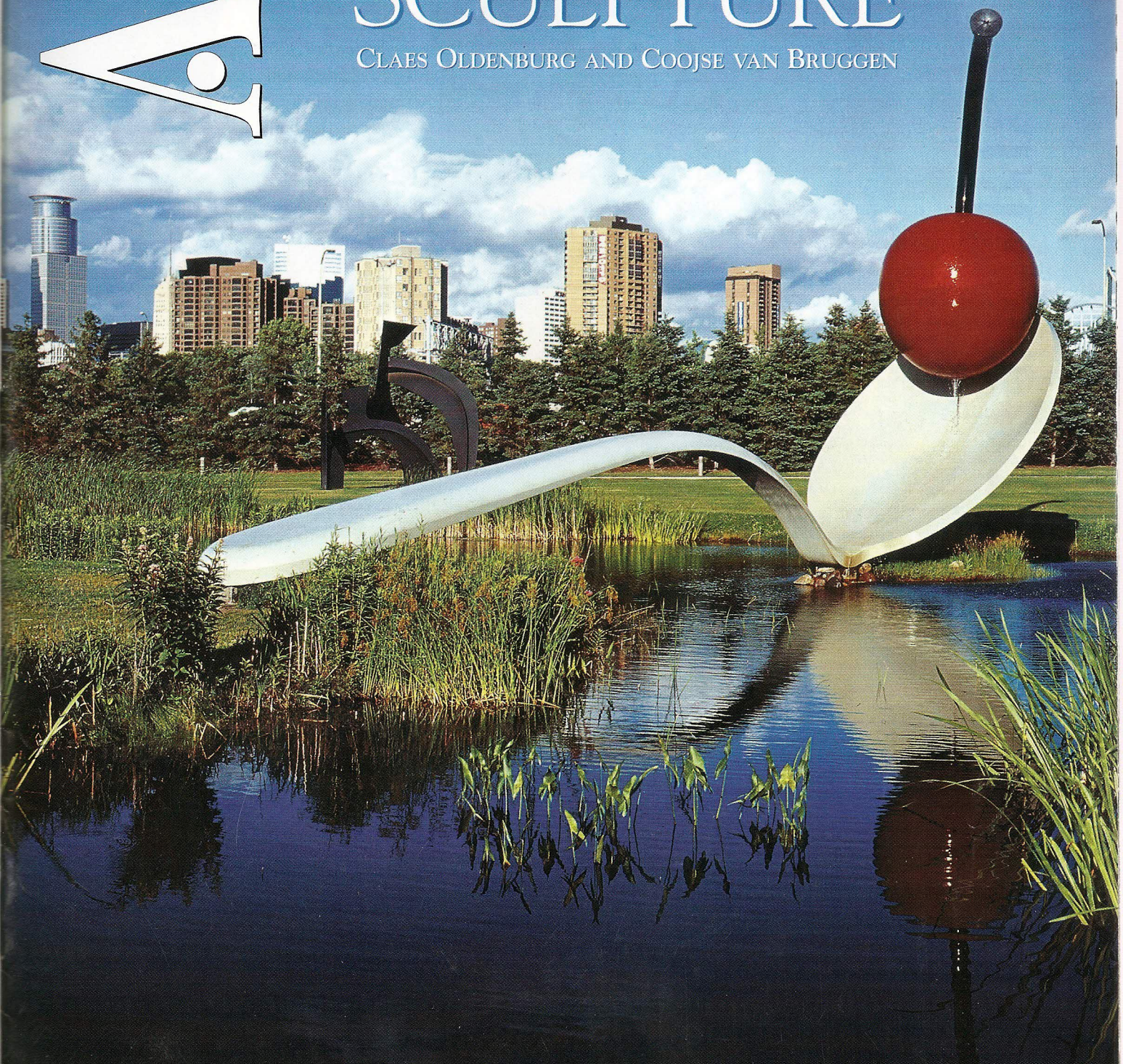


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WORKING WITH MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE

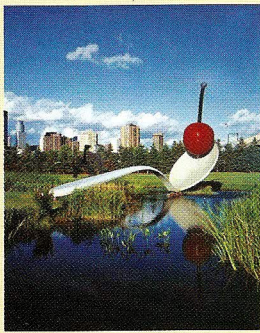
CLAES OLDENBURG AND COOJSE VAN BRUGGEN



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COVER: Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, 1985-88. Aluminum, stainless steel, paint, 354 x 618 x 162 inches. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Frederick R. Weisman in honor of his parents, William and Mary Weisman, 1988. Photo by Attilio Maranzano.

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“I WANT TO BUILD MONUMENTS OF EVERYDAY THINGS IN PLACES NOT TYPICALLY THOUGHT OF AS CULTURAL.” —CLAES OLDENBURG

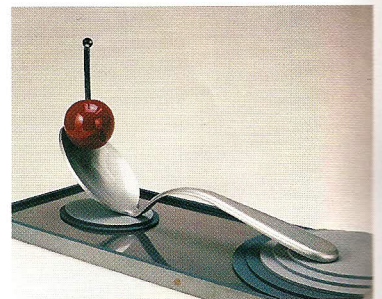
An enormous spoon that serves as a bridge, a 1,200-pound cherry, and a huge clothespin nearly as tall as some of the buildings that surround it. How were these vast structures constructed, why were they built, and what makes them works of art?

For more than 25 years, artists Claes (Claws) Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen (CO-sha van BRU-gan), have been creating huge public sculptures. The artists have completed over 40 large-scale outdoor projects in the U. S. and abroad. They have constructed a giant pair of binoculars in California, a huge flashlight in Las Vegas, and a vast spoon in Minneapolis. But no matter how large and complex these outdoor monuments are, they all have one thing in common. Each is based on a simple, everyday object.

Clothespin (right) was one of Oldenburg's first monumental sculptures. After seeing the artist's drawing, a Philadelphia developer wanted to make the structure real. Many people were outraged; they felt that a clothespin monument right across from City Hall was undignified. But the work went up anyway. The 45-foot sculpture resembles an abstract human form. Supported by two diagonals, the clip on top is the work's focal point. *Clothespin* is now a major Philadelphia tourist attraction.

Spoonbridge and Cherry (cover, pages 8-9) was designed for a garden at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The 52-foot-long spoon's concave bowl sits on an island in a pond, while its convex handle joins the island to the mainland. The cherry balanced on the spoon serves as a visual accent and is also a fountain. The water sprays from the top and bottom of the stem. Oldenburg and van Bruggen wanted the monument to reflect Minnesota's Scandinavian and Native American heritages. So they created a shape resembling a canoe or a Viking ship's prow. The 7,000-pound aluminum and stainless steel sculpture was constructed at two shipyards in New England, then carried to Minnesota on a flatbed truck.

To create their monuments, the artists spend time in the community, studying the site. *Clothespin*'s straight lines and sharp, geometric angles fit into its urban setting. And the organic curves of *Spoonbridge and Cherry* harmonize with the wooded landscape in which it is set. By enlarging small, familiar objects to such vast sizes, Oldenburg and van Bruggen redefine the relationship between art and architecture. And, dwarfed by these giant “found objects,” the viewer is forced to see the landscape in an entirely new way.



Sketch and working model made for the monumental sculpture shown on the cover.

(Top) Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. *View of Spoonbridge and Cherry with Sailboat and Running Man*, 1988. Pencil, pastel, chalk, 33 1/2 in. x 20 in. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Acquired in conjunction with the commissioning of *Spoonbridge and Cherry* for the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

(Bottom) Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. *Spoonbridge and Cherry (Model)*, 1987. Painted wood, Plexiglas, 22 1/2 in. x 22 1/2 in. x 49 1/2 in. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Acquired in connection with the construction of the Sculpture Garden, 1994.

Than Life



▲ "I am for an art that takes its forms from the lines of life."
— Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg, *Late submission to the Chicago Tribune Architectural Competition of 1922; Clothespin (Version Two)*, 1967. Crayon, pencil, watercolor, 22 x 23 1/4 in. Purchased with funds from Gardner Cowles and gift of Charles Cowles, Des Moines Art Center, Permanent Collection.

Claes Oldenburg, b. 1929.
Clothespin, 1976. Cor-Ten and stainless steel, 45 ft x 12 ft 3 1/4 in. x 4 ft 6 in. Centre Square Plaza, Fifteenth and Market Streets, Philadelphia. Photo by Attilio Maranzano.

CLAES OLDENBURG: Objects into Art

“I LIKE TO TAKE AN OBJECT AND COMPLETELY DEPRIVE IT OF ITS FUNCTION, SO AS TO USE IT ONLY AS A MOTIVE FOR CREATING ART.”

—CLAES OLDENBURG

For many years, American sculptor Claes Oldenburg has been transforming ordinary items, making us see them with fresh eyes. He has bent, inflated, melted, and enlarged familiar objects until they have become almost unrecognizable. In Oldenburg’s world, the useful objects we count on—plumbing, telephones, light switches—have become unreliable, even a little frightening.

Oldenburg’s creativity can be traced back to his childhood. The son of a Swedish diplomat, the artist was born in Sweden in 1929. As a childhood game, Oldenburg created an entire city complete with maps, newspapers, and magazines. He was also often left to entertain himself with his father’s office machinery—the typewriters, erasers, and rubber stamps that have appeared in so many of his sculptures. The family moved to the United States, and Oldenburg went to school in Chicago. He attended Yale, went to art school, then moved to New York in 1956. There he experimented with performance art which the artist felt “broke down barriers between the arts, becoming something close to an actual experience.”

During the late 1950s, a group known as Pop artists, which included Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Oldenburg began to use images associated with popular cul-

ture in their work. In 1961, Oldenburg opened his own “store”, filling it with rough plaster, garishly painted consumer items and fast food such as *Two Cheeseburgers with Everything* (below). The artist sold these items right from his store. Later, he took hard, rigid items like kitchen and bathroom fixtures and made his own soft collapsible versions.

Oldenburg has always been fascinated by **scale**.

During the 1960s, he began enlarging everyday items, imagining them the size of public monuments. Everywhere he traveled, he replaced existing monuments with those of his own design. His non-heroic subjects challenged traditional concepts of public sculpture. The artist has envisioned a huge pair of scissors on the site of the Washington



Claes Oldenburg carrying his soft sculpture *Giant Toothpaste Tube*.

Oxford Street, London 1966. Photo by Hans Hammarström

► “Very often I am sitting at dinner and I take out my notebook. I get very inspired when I eat for some reason.”
—Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg. *Two Cheeseburgers with Everything (Dual Hamburgers)*, 1962. Burlap soaked in plaster, painted with enamel, 7 x 14 3/4 x 8 5/8 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund. Photo © 2002 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Monument, a giant fan to replace the Statue of Liberty, and two enormous toilet-tank floats installed on a river in the city of London.

► **“My aim is to give existence to fantasy —Claes Oldenburg**

Claes Oldenburg, *Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, New York: Good Humor Bar*. 1965. Crayon and watercolor, 23 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches. Collection, Carol Janis, New York. Photo by Allen Finkelman, courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim, N.Y.

These early monuments may have been fantastic, but their design always had something to do with their location. The Thames (Tems), a river that flows through London, is affected by the rise and fall of its tides. If the tides are not controlled, the city could flood. Pollution is also a factor. The floats that regulate a toilet's water level in Oldenburg's *Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River* (below), not only make a social comment, but solve both problems.

Sometimes Oldenburg's designs added to a city's difficulties, as in *Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, New York* (right). But since the streets of New York City are so congested, who would notice a mammoth ice-cream pop that fills an intersection? While people waited, they could enjoy the melting ice cream. And if they couldn't wait, they could pass through the gigantic bite taken out of the corner.

In 1976 Oldenburg joined forces with author and artist Coosje van Bruggen. Married in 1977, the artists are equal partners in the creation of huge public sculptures.



▼ **“Public art is great when it generates controversy, because then you have a kind of dialogue.” —Claes Oldenburg**

Claes Oldenburg, *Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River: Thames "Ball."* 1967. Crayon, ink, watercolor on postcard. 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches. Collection, Carol Janis, New York. Photo by Allen Finkelman, courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim, N.Y.



Defying Gravity

“GRAVITY IS MY FAVORITE FORM CREATOR.”— CLAES OLDENBURG



◀ “I make my work out of my everyday experiences, which I find as perplexing and extraordinary as can be.”
— Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *Tube Supported by Its Contents*. 1985. Bronze and steel, painted with polyurethane enamel. 15 feet by 12 feet x 9 feet 6 inches. Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, Germany. Photo by Volker Döhne



► “If you came to my studio you would find my works floating and tied to the walls, because the force I most respect is gravity.” — Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Toilet*, 1966. Vinyl, Plexiglas, kapok on painted wood base, overall. 57 1/16 x 27 5/8 x 28 1/16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y., 50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Ganz.

What others might see as obvious and commonplace, Claes Oldenburg sees as extraordinary and unexpected. Through his art, Oldenburg forces us to interpret objects in an entirely different way. He uses familiar objects to explore what he calls “parallel realities,” or the many identities a form can take. The artist expresses these identities by changing an object’s **size, texture, structure, location,** or the **material** from which it is made. Real household fixtures and appliances (sinks, bathtubs, juicers) made of metal, plastic, and porcelain are solid, rigid, and hard. But, since Oldenburg’s versions of these objects are made from materials like canvas, cloth, and plastic, they sag and droop.

Soft Toilet (right) is sewn from pieces of vinyl and Plexiglas. Hanging from the wall, distorted and baggy, this vital piece of plumbing has become completely useless. It is an outer skin with no working parts inside. The way the components are arranged gives the sculpture a human quality. The lid suggests a face, while the open bowl might resemble a screaming mouth.

The sculpture *Soft Fur Good Humors* (below, left) is obviously based on Popsicle shapes. However, the artist has changed the **scale, color,** and **texture** of the originals. The same shape is **repeated** four times. Twice as large as life-size, each of these Popsicles is made of a different kind of imitation fur. The patterns are polka-dotted, cow spotted, tiger striped, and leopard. A large bite has been taken out of each. Two of the fur patterns might be considered “natural.” But the leopard-marked pop is a bright and “unnatural” green.

The force of gravity pulls *Soft Toilet* toward the ground. But gravity is violated even more dramatically in Oldenburg and van Bruggen’s large-scale outdoor sculpture *Tube Supported by Its Contents* (far left). While the toilet sculpture is soft and saggy, this tube of toothpaste is not

◀ “I think it’s very important that you keep access to your past and your childhood experiences.” — Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg *Soft Fur Good Humors*, 1963. Fake fur filled with kapok, wood painted with enamel, Four, each: 2 x 9 1/2 x 19 inches. Mitchell C. Shaheen, The Brett Mitchell Collection, Inc. Photo by Ellen Page Wilson



only gigantic, it is also solid and hard. The curved **positive shapes** formed by the white paste encircle the **negative spaces** between. Together they form a **built-in base** which **balances** the red tubelike shape above. Modeled on a small item originally designed to be discarded, this huge monumental work is made of bronze, a material that lasts for centuries. In this sculpture might the artists be making a statement about the values of modern society? Or, could they be suggesting that the small, ordinary objects we take for granted are really among the most important things in our lives?

