

## BEING RAY JOHNSON

MICHAEL FINDLAY



I WOULD IMAGINE that this shot was taken at the end of a show of Chuck Hinman's canvases, Hinman being a painter who is still alive and at work. I was director of exhibitions at Feigen Gallery, which in those days was at 24 East 81st Street. As Hinman's show is coming down, Ray Johnson and I are looking at the beginnings of where his framed collages might be arranged for the next exhibition.

He would bring them in and we would place them around the floor to make decisions about how they

were going to be hung—normal procedure. With Ray, though, it was fairly intense. I won't say difficult, but he took great care over what was next to what, the relationships, the scale. This was in contrast to his laissez-faire, throw-something-in-the-mail-and-see-what-happens attitude as the creator of the New York Correspondance School.

Often, in photographs, Ray's smiling, he's doing something, he's at an event, creating an event, he's in a way performing Ray Johnson.

Here, he's very much the artist controlling his exhibition, *not* performing Ray Johnson. Ray knew [the photographer] Bill Wilson well enough that he would be entirely comfortable with him there. He wouldn't be "on" for him. Not that

he switched on and off, but this is a moment when he's unguarded. And totally focused.

It's interesting that we're looking in different directions. "Well, I'd like it to go here." "No, I think it should go over *there*."

Chuck Hinman was, I think, a minor-league baseball player in his very early years, and very athletic, and so the way he's standing is actually quite typical. He was good-looking and easygoing, like a rangy farm boy, but he was doing very sophisticated paintings. Chuck's shows sold out. He did these meticulously crafted shaped canvases. If you looked at them from behind, they looked like hulls of boats, or something like that. Great skill. He pretty much kept doing the same thing. Which isn't a crime. Although today maybe it is a crime. ○

Above, Michael Findlay, Ray Johnson, Charles Hinman and unknown man, Richard Feigen Gallery, Nov. 13, 1967. Photo William S. Wilson.

AS TOLD TO BRIAN BOUCHER.