

CHELSEA Space, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, UK

Edited and designed by Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp from 1970 to 1976, the journal *Avalanche* was a forum for the presentation of art work and ideas dedicated to conversation and exchange. Almost 30 years after its final issue *Avalanche*'s lack of availability has recently inspired two projects that have resurrected it as facsimile. In 2003 the New York-based group Continuous Project re-issued a photocopied edition of the first issue of *Avalanche* as the first in a series of reproductions of rare magazines. This summer all 13 issues of the publication were photocopied in their entirety and pasted across the walls of the CHELSEA Space, displayed alongside a few of the original editions in frames and vitrines, in an exhibition curated by Lisa LeFeuvre.

Avalanche focused on new forms of art-making, providing a timely format for art's movement away from galleries and museums and towards the printed page and emerging discourses surrounding Performance and Land art. The magazine's interviews were all conducted by the editors, who used an informal but probing manner; the articles sometimes

ran to 16 pages. While at the time the featured artists were relatively unknown, today they read like a *Who's Who* of the avant-garde. The square covers of the early issues feature now iconic portraits of artists; Joseph Beuys (Issue 1), Lawrence Weiner (Issue 4), Yvonne Rainer (Issue 5), Vito Acconci (who had the whole of Issue 6 dedicated to him) and an unshaven Bruce Nauman (Issue 2), whose portrait, Peter Schjeldahl suggested, 'redefined sex appeal for a generation'. The features on artists were set alongside a 'Rumbles' section, featuring news and announcements that ranged from an artist having a baby to a museum show, and a publications list that was so extensive it must have included almost anything that was sent to the editors. In the early issues Bear and Sharp occasionally designed the advertisements themselves, which included a number of established galleries, revealing a sense of collaboration and trust that was typical of the magazine. Egalitarian though it was, it is difficult not to notice a gender imbalance in the early issues (a woman only made it onto the cover of Issue 5), which is perhaps indicative of the time it was produced.

Running in columns of double-page spreads across the walls of the gallery in crisp new white pages, *Avalanche* forms

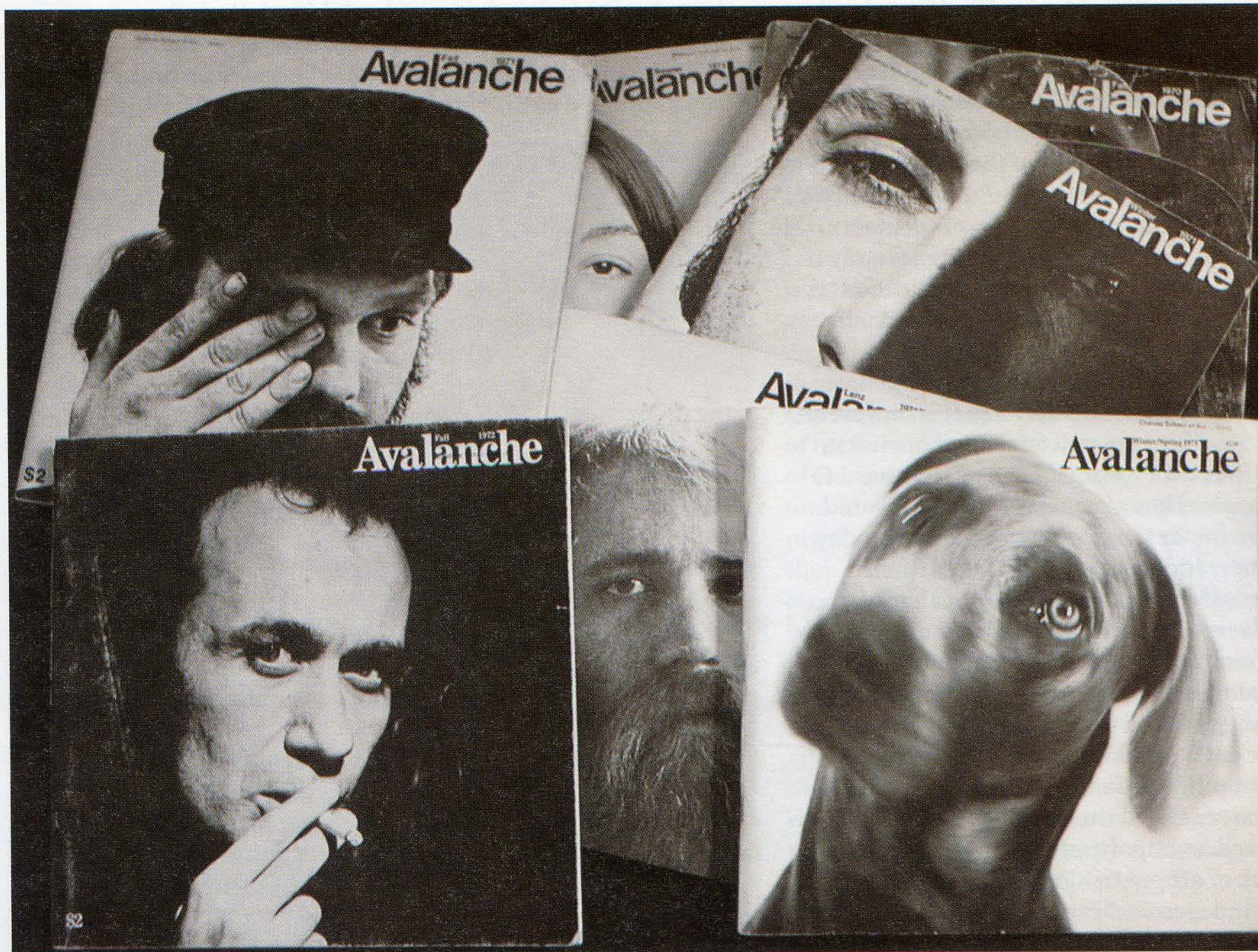
a map of an art scene at a particular moment in time; visually cross-referencing the issues, makes apparent the connections that were at the heart of this close community. While a number of the artists' projects that were featured have since transcended the magazine, the more transient information contained in the advertising section stretches beyond exhibitions to include more incidental details, such as where people ate or where videos were produced. In Issue 1 Byker Gallery uses its advert as a 'Stop the War' protest, giving a particular socio-political backdrop that feels familiar today. On the back of the posthumous Robert Smithson issue an advert for Max's Kansas City (perhaps traded for hot dinners) uses a scrawled map that Smithson had drawn on one of their menus plotting the sites of his art work across the USA. In Issue 4 Gordon Matta-Clark and Tina Girouard advertised the artist-led restaurant Food's 'fiscal facts', which counted everything from salaries to free dinners. Also visible through the advertising section is the way in which Sharp embedded himself in the magazine, frequently placing adverts under different pseudonyms, such as the 'Mighty Mogul of the Art Scene', notifying people of his availability as a guest lecturer, exclaiming 'You can get this ham cheap!' or offering to 'take an LSD trip with someone of similar aesthetic sensibilities' at Food in order to make a collaborative video performance.

Sharp's quips on media mogulism provide a poignant indication of what the editors were not. In place of an image of an artist, the cover of the last issue of *Avalanche* (Issue 13) bore Bear and Sharp's own fiscal facts in the form of their accounts, showing that the figures simply did not add up, revealing a publication that, like many, was run on enthusiasm rather than entrepreneurship. What is striking about the magazine now is its intimacy with the art scene that it represented, and its responsiveness and openness to the participation of artists. It is hard to imagine how a magazine like this would fare under the market pressures of today, where independent publishers often struggle with the reluctance of backers, advertisers and distributors to support non-profit initiatives that fall outside the mainstream. LeFeuvre's exhibition not only provided a rare opportunity to see the entirety of a magazine that provided a mouthpiece for a community of artists who redefined the nature of art but also posed an important question as to the future of art publishing and how to sustain an independent critical voice.

Emily Pethick

Stephen Shore
Trail's End Restaurant,
Kanab, Utah,
August 10, 1973
1973
C-type print

Avalanche
1970-76
Magazines



Avalanche 1970-1976