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# Allan Kaprow

Allan Kaprow was part of the Judson Gallery in the early 1960s. \_\_\_\_\_

**B**ud Scott, den-father of Judson House and assistant minister of Judson Church in 1959, was a serious poet. Not an academic, he appeared to me the archetypal “beatified” artist popularized by Jack Kerouac’s twist on the Beat Generation: not beaten down but inspired visionary.

Judson House, next to the church, was home then to a small group of likeminded poets and students. It radiated with street-smart hipness, and around Bud Scott there formed the promise of a renewed religious experience not to be found in Scripture alone.

You might have found it in the bars and in the gutters and trash baskets outside the church. Or you might have found it in the tiny basement room that Bud started as an art gallery. Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg were already active there, and they introduced me to Bud. It was through Bud that I met Howard Moody, Judson’s senior minister.

Howard Moody, in contrast to Bud Scott, was the only “man of the cloth” I’d ever come across who did not cloak himself with pieties of goodness. It wasn’t that Bud was falsely “spiritual.” Bud was more possessed, more fired up. He was a perfect magnet for the turned-on hippie. Howard’s feet were on the ground. His speech was plain but strongly principled, and he attracted a following of artistically and socially committed liberals. The two men seemed to me an ideal match.

In 1960 Bud was planning to move on to a monastic retreat and I was asked to help continue the gallery program. A slot in the calendar was open and I set to work filling the little basement room with an environmental maze of chicken wire, colored lights, bunched-up newspaper, straw, cloth, fake and real apples, and much litter (*Apple Shrine*).

The show was an obvious firetrap but Howard never lifted a finger. One Sunday morning when I was working, he stopped by to invite me to hear a sermon he and Bud had planned for that day’s ser-

vice. The talk was unusual. Its central theme was the role of the arts in everyday life. I do not recall which of the two was speaking, but the gist was, "In the past the artist went to the Church for spiritual instruction. Now the Church must go to the artist."

Very flattering, I thought. But I could not imagine why anyone would want to be instructed by the experimental art I and my friends were making. In retrospect, the sticky word was *spiritual*. What did (does) it mean?

Today, I suspect that the word *art* is just as problematical. We have inherited a notion that art itself is spiritual, and that it can make life better, or clearer, just as religion and church can do. Art (or spirit) comes packaged in poems, sonatas, plays, paintings, church buildings, and ceremonies. If these are better, or clearer, than life and its difficulties, why aren't they gobbled up like drugs and money?

Maybe the problem with religion and its relative, art, is that we are terribly unhappy unless we create problems we cannot solve with words. And here I am using words to say so.

This latest problem I attribute to that Sunday sermon.

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**ALLAN KAPROW**

lives in California. He was curator of the 1999 show "No Limits" at Judson Memorial Church, which celebrated Judson's involvement in the arts in the 1950s and 1960s.