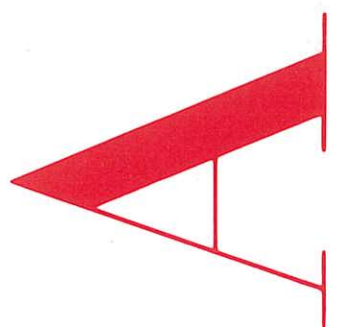
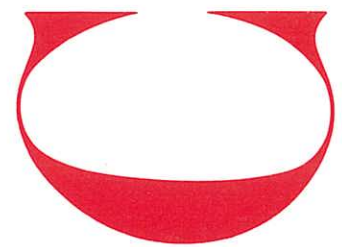
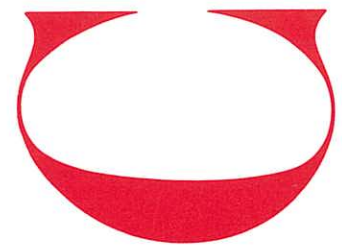
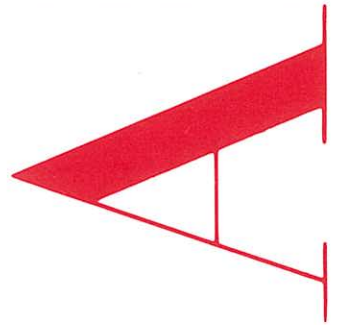


Mark  
**KOSTABI**

*October 10th to November 17th, 1985*



Mark Kostabi, "Is there anything else you'd like to add" / "Just lots of zeros to my prices." 1985  
Oil on canvas, 182 x 122 cm, Brisbane



## Mark Kostabi and the East Village

"... a unique blend of poverty, punk rock, drugs, arson, Hells angels, winos, prostitutes, dilapidated housing, that adds up to an adventurous avant garde setting of considerable cachet."<sup>1</sup>

The distinctive avant garde ambience of New York's East Village (approximately 10 square blocks on the East Side of Manhattan Island) has often received as much attention as the rapid and exciting proliferation of new galleries and young artists which has marked the area's fruitful development over the past few years. East Village art, if such a collective term can be used with accuracy, derives a good deal of creative energy and substantial market potential from its much celebrated origins in street culture; note the influence of TV, cartoons, video games and graffiti.

Mark Kostabi is a young artist who recently visited Australia and has exhibited in a number of East Village galleries including 'Semaphore', 'Eastman-Wahmendorf' and 'Limbo Lounge', as well as elsewhere in New York. His paintings, with their sharp and sometimes shocking aphoristic titles, depict a strange and ominous futuristic world touched by the enigma and grandeur of a medieval epic. His faceless mannequins embody the Everyman, the hero and the anti-hero who acts out ritualized deeds on the stage provided by late capitalism. The law of the land is commerce - at its worst dog eat dog, where "*A friend in need is a friend better dead*". Sinister pacts are made by villainous and secret embraces, whilst magic chants are uttered beneath the breath: "*Is there anything else you'd like to add?*" / "*Just zeros to my prices*". Generalized statements of pragmatic truths stand in for the thoughts and emotions of individuals.

Kostabi's art epitomizes much that is central to the East Village and to art in the 1980s, in particular an acceptance and, at times, even celebration of the art market and the commercial gallery system. For all its aura of youthful and radical bohemianism (a quality often associated with the avant garde),

the East Village phenomena is firmly, if only partially, rooted in economics.<sup>2</sup> Its collective identity is openly and closely tied to the creative marketing strategies of a number of imaginative artists and gallery dealers. The thought that the East Village might provide an "alternative" to the mainstream gallery or museum system is tempered by the acknowledgement that many a successful East Village artist might work his way up through the commercial ranks.

Mark Kostabi has become notorious for his blatant and very deliberate displays of the virtues of opportunism, and his expose of an art world where the law of the market and the cash register reigns supreme. His cynicism is devastating, particularly as it is presented to us almost wholly without irony, though sometimes with a touch of humour, in the titles of his works, in various magazine interviews, and in numerous quips and aphoristic statements ("Take the 'r' out of free", "Take the 'p' out of spell"). The artist has gone to great lengths to construct a public persona which is as much in tune with the laws of the market as are the images in his paintings. The debt to Pop art is clear. Andy Warhol was amongst the first to market himself as a celebrity along with his art. Perhaps more interesting is the link with Conceptual art, which has often sought to analyse how the art work functions within a complex economic and art world system. Kostabi can be seen as a post-conceptual image maker. Very definitely he is a painter of the 1980s.

Sue Cramer  
Melbourne 1985

1. Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick "Slouching Towards Avenue D. Report from East Village", *Art in America*, Summer 1984, pp 134-161.
2. See Craig Owens' discussion of this issue in "Commentary: The Problem of Puerilism", *Art in America*, Summer 1984, pp 162-163.

### MARK KOSTABI

Born in Whittier, California, 1960.  
Studied in California State University, Fullerton, 1978-1981.  
Lives in New York.

### CATALOGUE LISTING

"Within History" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 177 x 122, New York

"Gravity fuels the rocket to inner space" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 178 x 107, New York

"To see through is not to see into" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 158 x 122, New York

"A friend in need is a friend better dead" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 117 x 178, New York

"On Your Mark" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 122 x 177, New York

"Don't say 'If I had a choice', because you do" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 177 x 122, New York

"Toowong too long" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 183 x 122, New York

"Is there anything else you'd like to add?"  
"Just lots of zeros to my prices" 1985  
Oil on canvas, 182 x 122, Brisbane

"Take the 'L' out of learn" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"Where are we?" "The answer is Warrawee!" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"To unclog the toilets of the modern mind" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"A dollar a day keeps the doctor at play" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"Live and earn" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"Not again Tony-O" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"Beg, borrow and . . ." 1985  
Ink on paper, 24 x 30.5, Brisbane

"To see through is not to see into" 1985  
Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24, Brisbane

"Whisked away to Warrawee" 1985  
Ink on paper, 24 x 30.5, Brisbane

"Flaws are opportunity" 1985  
Ink on paper, 24 x 30.5, Brisbane

"Today forever now tomorrow now: and then . . ." 1985  
Ink on paper, 35 x 52, Brisbane

"Fragment of an epic" 1985  
Ink on paper, 35 x 52, Brisbane

"Are you consistent?" "Now and then" 1985  
Ink on paper, 52 x 35, Brisbane

"The beginning, the middle and the end" 1985  
Ink on paper, 35 x 52, Brisbane

### CATALOGUE NOTES

All works by Kostabi are courtesy Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane. Measurements are image size, in centimetres height x width.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art would like to thank Mark Kostabi for his co-operation and Ray Hughes and Julie O'Malley for their assistance in the preparation of this exhibition. Catalogue assembly by Ian Robertson, photography by Val Foreman, typesetting by Ultraset, printing by Photo Offset.