

# GENERAL IDEA

## TEST PATTERN

T.V. Dinner Plates from  
the Miss General Idea Pavillion

M A I 3 6 G A L E R I E

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

*Ether Schipper*



*“The Miss General Idea Pavillion is a decentralized building existing as a series of temporary and permanent installations in museums and galleries around the world. Like the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum, the Pavillion is a construct of gallery shop, boutiques, restaurants, bars, and cultural events and products gathered about the central theme of the museum as a spiritual abode of art. These TV Dinner Plates are designed to function in every mode of modern museum living.”*

General Idea—New York / Toronto, August 1988

General Idea in front of *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates* from the Miss General Idea Pavillion, 1988.



Installation view from *Haute Culture: General Idea – Une retrospective 1969-1994* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 2011.  
Photo by Pierre Antoine

## GENERAL IDEA

### *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion*

1988

Porcelain sushi plates

432 plates in 3 sections, each plate: 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  by 11 $\frac{7}{8}$  by  $\frac{5}{8}$  in. 22.5 by 30 by 1.5 cm; overall: 9 by 42 ft. 2.75 by 12.8 m

#### Provenance

Estate of General Idea, Toronto

#### Exhibited

Tokyo, Spiral (Wacoal Art Center), *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion*, 1988

New York, Koury Wingate Gallery, *General Idea, Cary Smith, Wolfgang Staehle*, 1989

Stuttgart, Württembergischer Kunstverein; Barcelona, Centre d'Art Santa Monica (titled *Pharma@opia*); Hamburg, Hamburger Kunstverein; Toronto, Power Plant; Columbus, Wexner Center for the Arts; San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *General Idea's Fin de Siècle*, 1992-93

Vienna, Kunsthalle Wien, *Televisions: Kunst sieht fern*, 2001-02

Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, *General Idea – Haute Culture: A Retrospective*, 2011-12

#### Literature

Mary Anne Staniszewski, ed., *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion*, Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo, 1988

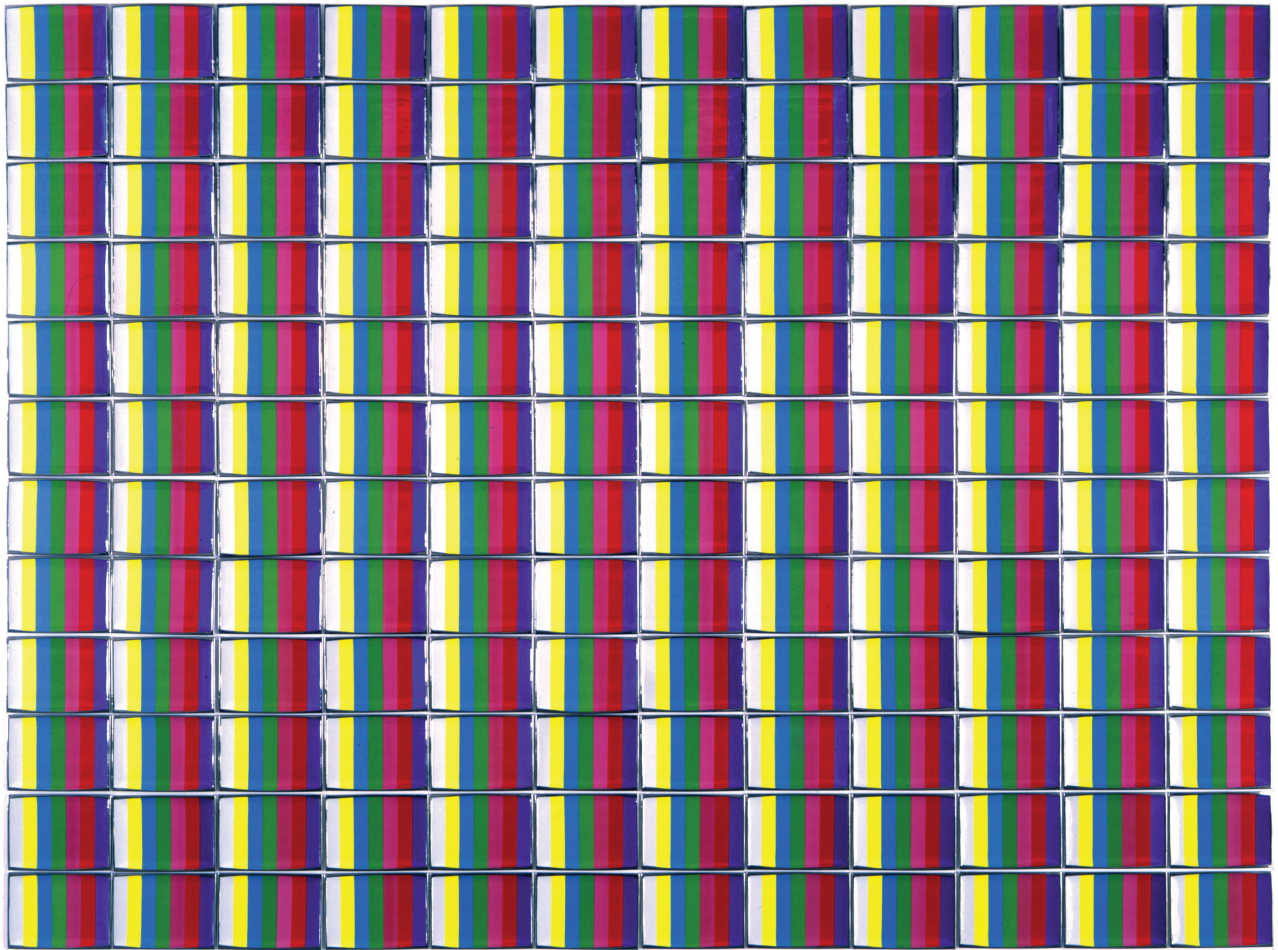
Allan Schwartzman, *General Idea: The AIDS Project*, Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, Toronto, 1989, p. 13

General Idea, ed., *General Idea's Fin de Siècle*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Kunstverein, Hamburg; and The Power Plant, Toronto, 1992, illustrated pp. 68-69

Gabriele Mackert, ed., *Televisions: Kunst sieht fern*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2001, p. 24, pp. 26-27, illustrated on cover (with portrait by Tohru Kogure)

Barbara Fischer, ed., *General Idea Editions 1967 – 1995, Blackwood Gallery*, University of Toronto at Mississauga, Mississauga, 2003, pp. 192-193

Frédéric Bonnet, ed., *General Idea – Haute Culture: A Retrospective*, ARC/Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; AGO, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2011, p. 32, illustrated pp. 130-131



Amongst the first artists to implement media critique and queer theory in their work, AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal came together in 1969 to form the collaborative General Idea. For twenty-five years, they created a pioneering and singular body of work that addressed the intersection of art and commerce, the role of the artist and the museum, body politics and the AIDS crisis. Using strategies of appropriation, audience participation, humor and irony, they produced posters, performances, photographs, videos, paintings, magazines and other multiples that together form a kind of meta-spectacle as much as a formal artistic oeuvre. As Bronson notes, the group “emerged in the aftermath of the Paris riots, from the detritus of hippie communes, underground newspapers, radical education, Happenings, love-ins, Marshall McLuhan, and the International Situationists....General Idea was at once complicit in and critical of the mechanisms and strategies that join art and commerce, a sort of mole in the art world.”<sup>1</sup>

The present work, *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion*, features three gigantic banks of surveillance monitors, each composed of 144 porcelain plates printed with the SMPTE color bars in television test patterns. Building on the group’s 1979 video piece *Test Tube* (a parodic

yet prescient meditation on the collapse and intermingling of popular and high culture through the mass media), *Test Pattern* employs the form of the television screen to comment on the highly stylized and mediatized nature of the culture industry, serving it up (so to speak) on a wall of plates. The piece also highlights, in mimicking the format of security monitors, the group’s interest in and investigation of the social and aesthetic forces of cultural panopticism.

The initial impetus to create *Test Pattern* came from the exhibition venue itself. Established in 1985 by the Wacoal Corporation, Spiral is an arts center that includes exhibition spaces, a restaurant, a gallery shop and a cutting-edge video production facility. General Idea was intrigued by the concept of a place where you can “look, shop and eat,” and thus produced a work that could participate in all three, while featuring the dominant image of Japanese life of the moment, a video monitor.

<sup>1</sup> First sentence from AA Bronson, “Copyright, Cash, and Crowd Control: Art and Economy in the Work of General Idea,” in *General Idea: Haute Culture. A Retrospective, 1969-1994*. Exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2011; published by JRP|Ringier, Zurich), pp. 118-119. Second sentence from *Ibid.*, p. 123.



Installation views from *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates* from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion, SPIRAL, Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo, 1988.



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## **GENERAL IDEA**

Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion

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**MERIDIANS: GENERAL IDEA**