

# PUBLIC LIVES



MARY RODGERS

## Oklahoma Abroad

MARY RODGERS, daughter of Richard Rodgers, took three English women she calls "war babies" to a preview of Trevor Nunn's new production of her father's "Oklahoma!" at the Royal National Theater in London. The three — LADY ASTOR, GILLIAN WARRENDER and ZOE HYDE-THOMSON — spent World War II in New York and were her classmates at the Brearley School on the Upper East Side.

"I still call them kids even though we're all 67 years old," Miss Rodgers said. "The kids in school were envious of them. We loved their accents, and they were smarter. When they went home, they were accused of losing their British accents, of being Americanized, but they didn't sound that way to us at all."

And the show? Miss Rodgers gave it a thumbs up. "I wasn't bored," she said, "but it's three and a half hours. I think they'll tighten it up in the first act, especially."



ANTHONY SCAVONE

## Turning Heads

Now is the time for mid-summer silliness, or at least attention-getting stunts. Yesterday Campari, the Italian aperitif that is about the same color as weak Sangria, hired a room at Remi, a restaurant on West 55th Street in Manhattan. Campari's spokesmen said that the company had hired an artist to paint two "seminude" women the color of the drink.

The two women, ZHENYA PIZARRO and LANA PIRYAN, were wearing red bathing suits when the artist, JOANNE

# Saving Images of 'Dead Signs' on Old Walls

By RANDY KENNEDY

"TWEEZERS, nippers, manicure sets," says Frank H. Jump, reading slowly, his head craned back in a familiar stance.

He is on West 19th Street near Seventh Avenue staring up at a fading, chiaroscuro advertisement painted on a building by a long-gone company called Griffin Shears. The ad outlasted the business, but like hundreds of the city's so-called dead signs — murals for extinct goods or companies, painted high on brick walls — it is fast disappearing.

Mr. Jump, 38, an office manager, has appointed himself to save these relics, if only with a camera, as a reminder in a city of multistory billboards for multinational corporations that someone named Miss Weber once humbly promoted her millinery shop on West 22d Street. Or that a trial bottle of something called Omega Oil ("For Sunburn, for Weak Backs, for Athletes") could be had for only 10 cents. Or that Reckitt's Blue laundry bluing once bragged it was "the purest and best."

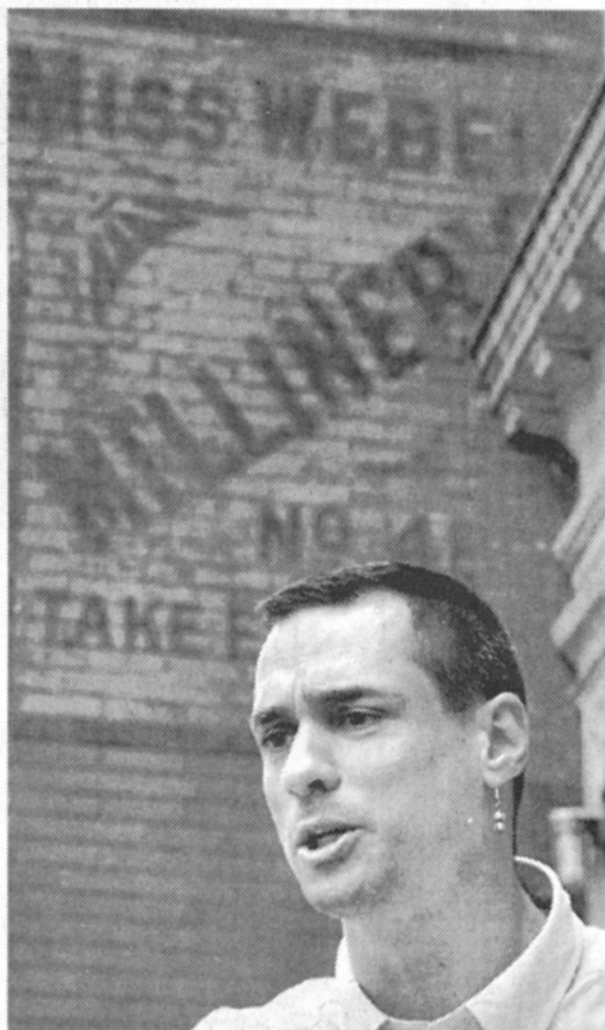
The odd thing is that Mr. Jump is not particularly interested in advertising or photography. He owns an old 35-millimeter Minolta and confesses to knowing little about its finer points. For 11 years, he has made sure the office of a Chelsea dentist pays the bills and sends the bills. Before that he worked testing pacemakers (including, once, Lillian Hellman's). But he has always been obsessed with history in a way he finds hard to explain, a kind of fascination with resilient traces left by transitory things.

Last year, when he was finishing the bachelor's degree he abandoned in the late 1970's to work, he took a photography course, accompanied a photographer to Harlem, and looking up, suddenly saw signs everywhere.

"It was kind of bizarre, but I felt an instant need to start photographing these things," he said this week, wandering around Chelsea on a work break, looking for signs.

It took one of his teachers at Empire State College to point out that maybe there was something deeper than nostalgia behind his work. Mr. Jump has been H.I.V. positive since 1984, and during the last decade he has watched dozens of friends wither and die from AIDS.

"She said, 'Frank, come on, look at what you're doing, look at your life.



Librado Romero/The New York Times

Frank H. Jump photographs old advertising signs painted on buildings in New York City.

Don't you see the connections?" he said. "According to some psychologists, there are no accidents, right? I guess this is no accident."

In statements that accompany his photographs, some of which will be shown at the New-York Historical Society starting on Aug. 4 and in Archaeology magazine in its November issue, Mr. Jump does not explicitly draw such parallels. But he has written that he sees the signs as "metaphors for survival, since many have long outlived their expected life span and the products they advertise."

IT is also difficult to avoid seeing the pictures as gravestones. With many, he includes captions explaining when the companies behind the ads were born and when they succumbed. (Omega Oil was incorporated Feb. 23, 1870, and was closed by the state April 2, 1924, for unpaid taxes, according to the State Division of Corporations.)

Mr. Jump was once told he would not live to see 30. Though his health has always been remarkably good, he lives every day with a sense of urgency that he has also discovered in his avocation.

"When I stumbled on this project,

it became another urgent matter for me, because a lot of these signs are around you, most people don't even realize they're there, and for all you know the following day, Mitsubishi will buy that spot, and it will be gone."

"Part of my urgency is I want to get these images documented before they're gone," he said. "And I would like to get the project noticed before I'm gone."

Quickly, laughing, he added: "Not that I have any plans of leaving anytime soon."

The project, which includes images of 500 signs from nearly every neighborhood in the city, is a more somber incarnation of the artistic ambitions Mr. Jump has nurtured since he was a platform-shoed, Huck-A-Poo-shirted disco teen-ager yearning to break out of middle-class Queens.

(He grew up in Far Rockaway and Laurelton and Howard Beach, the only son of Harold Jump, an avionics technician for Pan American World Airways, and Willy Jump, an au pair who immigrated from Amsterdam in the late 1950's. They are now divorced; his mother lives in Starrett City in Queens and his father lives upstate.)

He has never been the shy sort — he is given to wearing bright orange shirts and bolo ties and long dangly earrings — but the project has transformed Mr. Jump into a kind of fearless archeological superhero in his own hometown.

Friends call to alert him to a sign recently revealed by demolition or threatened with whitewashing, and he takes off from work with his camera. The tall, lanky Mr. Jump has climbed trees, braved razor wire and talked his way into the apartments of total strangers, where he has talked them into sitting on his legs while he leans out their windows to get just the right shot.

On West 17th Street he climbed atop a Federal Express truck while the driver was away to get a shot of a tiny mural for a kind of rent-a-car garage of its day, on a red-brick building that now houses a store selling expensive Japanese screens. The sign says, "To Let, Carriages, Coupes, Hansoms," and "Victoria's Light Wagons, Horses Taken in Board by the Month."

"The driver came back and he said, 'You get the hell off there,' and I said very nicely, 'I just need a minute or two more, thanks.'"