

## ART

# Messages Communicated by the Detritus



By HELEN A. HARRISON

## "Timepieces"

Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, Campus Center, State University at Old Westbury. To Nov. 3. 876-3056.

Society's castoffs, whether intentional or accidental, are the preoccupation of Alan Michelson and William Graef. Both artists question what we consider valuable and offer critiques of our sense of what is worth preserving.

Mr. Graef's wall-mounted sculptures are enlargements of familiar disposable items like receipts, labels and product wrappers. In the irreverent spirit of a Pop artist, he renders the small flimsy items as large zinc plaques. No longer can they be crumpled up and tossed away carelessly. Having acquired monumental proportions and material permanence, they now have to be confronted and reckoned with.

The fact that Mr. Graef's objects resemble tombstones is hardly accidental, and the reference links them conceptually to Mr. Michelson's work, which deals with actual burial sites. But whereas Mr. Graef makes the ephemeral concrete, Mr. Michelson focuses on the loss and destruction of things meant to endure.

To create "Permanent Title," Mr. Michelson visited the locations of cemeteries displaced by urban development. Because the graves and

tombstones no longer exist, he has made rubbings of the structures and markers that have supplanted them. As a vivid reminder of the implicit desecration, each rubbing is done on cloth fashioned into a copy of an old-fashioned "body bag" made of waxed muslin.

The burial shrouds are reincarnated as sleeve-like hangings in "Cult of Memory," a wall piece that commemorates the casualties of yellow fever who were once buried at what is now Washington Square. They reach out from the past in a mute protest against our disregard for the sanctity of their resting place.

## "Knot Too Tightly Wrapped"

Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, 295 Fulton Ave., Hempstead. To next Sunday. 481-5700.

Some of the 10 artists in this group exhibition use wrapping in a literal way, while others imply, through imagery or content, that the surface conceals more than it reveals.

The shrine or reliquary form is a favorite of artists interested in exploring the role of memory. Maria and William Heinrich suggests that fixing memories is a painful process. Mr. Heinrich's pieces made of animal traps hold in their jaws collected fragments pressed between squares of plate glass. The pressure of the traps bears down on the fragile souvenirs and threatens harm to anyone who dares disturb them.



Whiting Photographers

"Art and the Artist: Picasso, Wives, Lovers and Offspring," left, by Larry Rivers; "Permanent Title," center, by Alan Michelson, and a work by Joan Bleyer Lazarus in "Knot Too Tightly Wrapped" at museum in Hempstead.

In "Reliquary No. 33," Ms. Heinrich cradles a collection of ephemera in the hollow of a hefty beam topped by a spiked lid. The little mementoes seem too trivial to deserve such protection, implying that what appears inconsequential to one person may be precious to another.

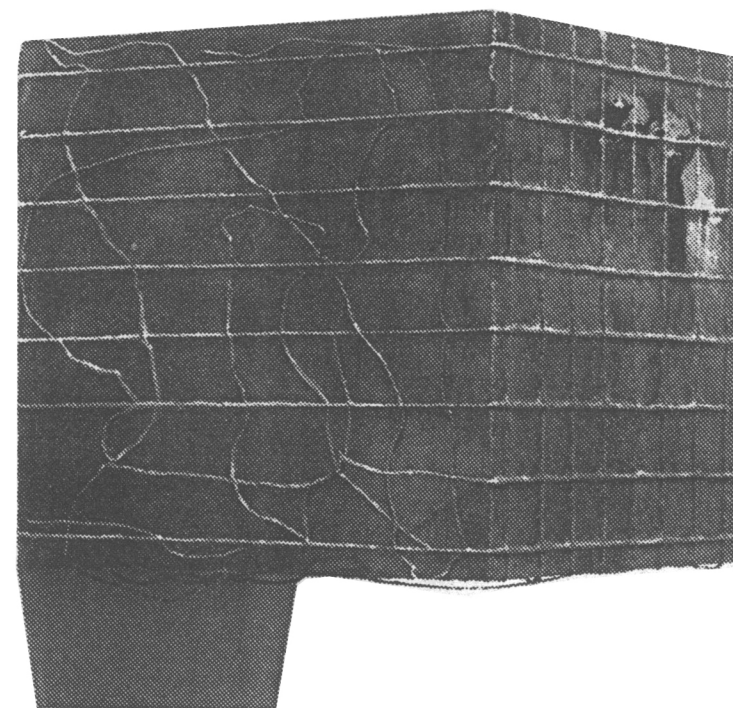
Kathryn Newman mimics the specimen boxes used to collect and classify rocks, bones and insects, creating elaborate visual puns that allude to human situations.

Andrew Ruhren's assemblages have even more overtly autobiographical implications that refer to ambivalent feelings about home and

family. His "Book of Dreams" encases a rich fantasy life within the weighty earthbound confines of an iron framework that, like Mr. Heinrich's traps, offers both protection and imprisonment.

The paradox is emphasized in Mr. Ruhren's "Learn to Laugh," painted on the panes of an old sash window.

Discarded windows also provide the framework for M. D. Kerswill's "martyr" portraits, which combine voyeurism with erotic fantasy. We cannot be sure that what we see through the partly obscured glass is real, staged, or imagined, any more than we can draw the distinction



here between sex and violence.

Window screens are the vehicle for Fred Schober's darkly poetic abstractions based on planetary forms. The imagery is embedded in the metal mesh as if caught in the matrix of space, blending surface and substance into a unified entity.

Kathleen Mahoney asserts that the medium is the message in her heavily textured paintings. One untitled piece, made of a hollow door, allows the painting's canvas and stretcher bars to serve as free-floating elements, liberated from their traditionally subordinate roles, yet not completely "unwrapped" from the fabric of the work.

## "Art After Art"

Nassau County Museum of Art, 1 Museum Dr., Roslyn Harbor. To Jan. 1. 484-9338.

In spite of its muddled premise the exhibition reiterates the fact that art's development builds on previous achievements and precedents. Indeed, many contemporary artists, like their predecessors throughout history, have freely pillaged the past in the name of innovation.

The confusion is caused by lumping together artists who directly quote from or appropriate the works of others and those who use latter-day versions of earlier styles. Deliberate references, homages and parodies are far different from retardataire imitations of historical modes,

but the show fails to draw those distinctions.

There are more than enough examples of direct borrowing and adaptation to have made for an instructive show on that aspect alone. Some of the prime pilferers, from Larry Rivers and Roy Lichtenstein to George Deem and Manolo Valdes, are represented by outstanding tributes to their proprietary attitudes toward art history.

This is not intended as a put-down, although those artists often have their tongues planted firmly in their cheeks when uttering their quotations. And none is more impudent than Red Grooms, who savages everyone from the staid Benjamin West to the flamboyant Salvador Dalí. This viewer's personal favorite in the rogue's gallery is Mr. Grooms's rather affectionate takeoff of Albert Pinkham Ryder, which includes a pair of quite creditable pseudo-Ryders, complete with cracking impasto. The fact that Ryder has been widely faked adds piquancy to the parody.

Although Andy Warhol has unaccountably been left out of this tribute to thievery, one of his favorite subjects, the Mona Lisa, is given star treatment by Paul Giovanopoulos, who renders her in every imaginable permutation except, perhaps, his own. At his hands Mona gets the full makeover à la Warhol, Rivers, Lichtenstein, Dalí and a host of other painters, from Arcimboldo to Magritte. ■