

Burt Wasserman

Meeting the Third Dimension

THE NEVER-ENDING CURIOSITY of the exhibition scene constantly focuses on the question: "What are serious creative artists doing lately?" Now, as if in response, 56 sculptors have sent recently completed pieces from studios located in many different venues around the world for presentation at Grounds for Sculpture in Mercer County, New Jersey. They offer visitors an opportunity to see what internationally recognized figures in the field have put together lately as they push the limits of esthetic imagination to new boundaries of fulfillment. The exhibition is set to run through September 28.

All of the personalities represented in the show are members of the International Sculpture Center, an organization devoted to advancing the practice and appreciation of their craft and its unique presence in society. As a group display, the current offering adds up to an accurate cross-section of the significant directions contemporary sculptors are pursuing, no matter where on earth they live and work.

The installation was juried by an international panel of well regarded individuals. They included the installation artist, Helen Escobedo, a resident of Mexico and Germany, Steve Nash, director of the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas and Carter Ratcliff, a widely recognized critic and commentator on contemporary art of New York.

The judges chose the work from a group of nearly a thousand entries. The overall presentation is awesomely varied in style and marvelously alive with insights into ideas that sculptors are exploring today. As exhibitions go, this one is emotionally stimulating and intellectually provocative.

While the majority of the pieces on view are abstract in form, there are a number of representational works as well. It's also interesting to note that many of the examples are structured with a combination of media rather than a single traditional material like cast metal, carved stone or modeled clay. In addition, the entire presentation has been installed with considerable care, impeccable taste and meticulous attention to detail.

Judith Gregory's "Uncertain Journey: Chance or Choice," made up of such as-

sorted ingredients as paper, paint and wood, looks like a complex of mysteriously connected elements one might see in a dream. Suggesting the appearance of a coat with outstretched sleeves suspended above an open suitcase, it is an eerie image given shape in a richly diverse range of earth tones.

The "Bio-Morphic Form" of Foon Sham is a composite of sawn wooden pieces that have been assembled into a standing column-like presence. In its own distinctive fashion, it becomes a dramatic exposition of curved interior and exterior surfaces that are transformed into a hauntingly memorable construction in space. Matthew Weber has achieved a similar feeling in his hollow composite of cedar wood shim pieces, sensitively placed together to emerge as a stark, cylindrical form, able to provoke infinite study and mystical reflection by sincerely attracted spectators.

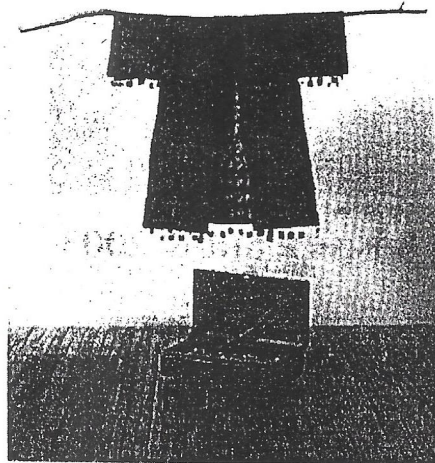
The cushiony, ample figure of Mary Ellen Scherl's cast bronze "Monumental Woman" is virtually a modern day Venus of Willendorf. A huge symbol of abundance, the sculpture manifests massive feminine proportions that are absolutely staggering on initial contact. Other examples on view in the Museum and Domestic Arts buildings complement these selections.

Outside, the Grounds have been enhanced by the placement of several new acquisitions. "Space of Stone," for example, by the Polish artist, Magdalena Abakanowicz consists of 22 chunks cut from blocks of granite and placed close to each other, prompting an association with the well known ruins of Stonehenge on the Salisbury Plain in southwestern England. Strolling about the site provides one with a profound awareness of the reality of form in space that no amount of words can adequately describe. The sensations one may experience here have a unique identity. They are significant and sufficient to both the timelessness and the immediacy of the occasion.

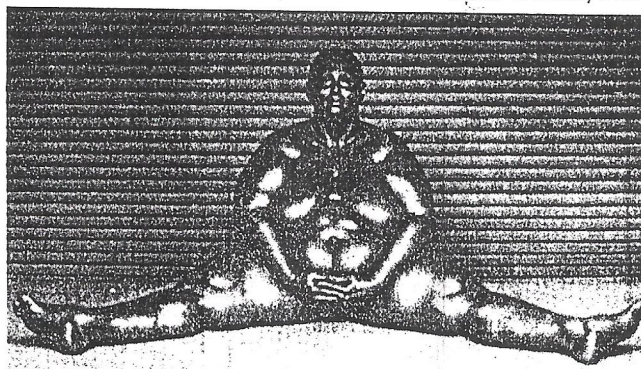
"Compression and Expansion" by Ron Mehlman is an extraordinary conjunction of onyx stone and plates of glass. Because of their juxtaposition and the sculptor's handling, the two materials treat light and color with a remarkable measure of theatrical magic.

Pat Musick's "Grupo" consists of large smooth stones banded with steel belting in the Water Garden area at Grounds, in a location next to the Domestic Arts building. A poem in praise of the benefit to be gained by achieving harmony between human accomplishment and the splendor of unspoiled nature, it offers thoughtful guidance for those ready to share in the expressive content it illuminates.

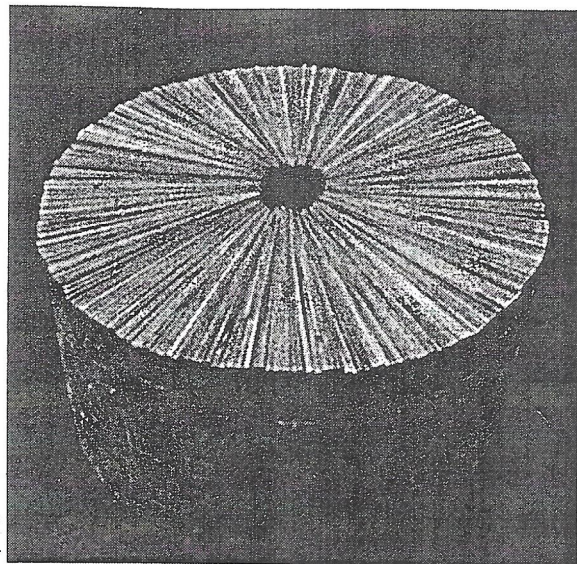
Incidentally, the "King Lear" sculpture by Seward Johnson, located in the same Water Garden area at Grounds, is an overwhelmingly evocative selection. It's as though the setting is a stage on which the eloquent old monarch of Shakespeare's play may twist and turn with mighty gestures, as he acts out the melancholy of his



Judith Olson Gregory, *Uncertain Journey: Chance or Choice*, 2001-03. Mixed media, 84" x 22" x 90" Courtesy of the Artist.
Photo: Richard Margolis



Mary Ellen Scherl, *Monumental Woman*, 1992. Bronze, 36" x 36" x 60". Courtesy of the Artist.
Photo: John Vallancourt



Matthew Weber, *Hollow Cedar Shim Construction*, 2002.
Stacked cedar shims, 165" x 33" x 33" Courtesy of the Artist.
Photo: Matthew Weber

anguished madness. The universality of his predicament, given voice by the power invested in the forms, is bound to touch chords of response located deep within the hearts and minds of receptive viewers

Grounds for Sculpture is located in Hamilton Township, NJ, a short distance east of the state capital at Trenton. For travel details and information about visitors' admission fees, open days and hours, call (609) 586-0616. If you haven't been there yet, it's time to go and see what you've been missing. ■

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