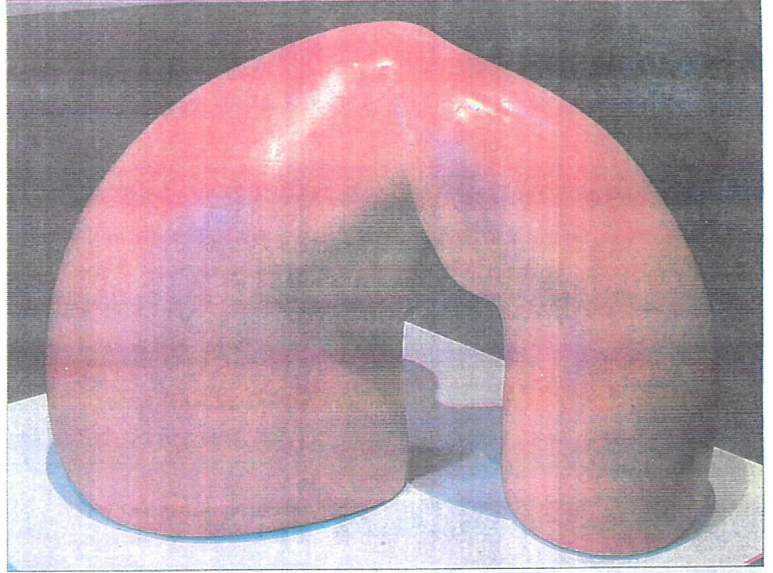


'THE CRAFT OF ART' AT NORWALK COMMUNITY COLLEGE



"Get in My Belly #1" by Joe Fucigna.



"Vegas, 2002" Ashley James.

Contributed photos

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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Until the 20th century, craft was an essential component of art. It was unthinkable for a Renaissance painter, for example, to create a masterpiece without incorporating skills learned through years of painstaking apprenticeship.

Yet, this condition changed with modernism, when a work of art became synonymous with invention. New forms expressed the abrupt break from classical tradition to the point that art became separated from craft. One figure instigating this revolt was Marcel Duchamp, who declared a "ready-made" object — most

REVIEW

famously a urinal — as art simply because the idea of presenting it as such was conceived by an artist. Duchamp had opened Pandora's Box. By the 1980s, cutting-edge artists with deep pockets such as Yoko Ono and Jeff Koons, who established their names through performance or spectacle, were paying anonymous others to create finely crafted works carrying their signatures. In the final decade of the 20th century, the definition of art expanded to the point that it was questionable how many artists elbowing their way into exhibitions ever touched their materials, thereby removing craft entirely from the artistic process.

Where does the relationship between art and craft exist at a time of renewed search for authen-

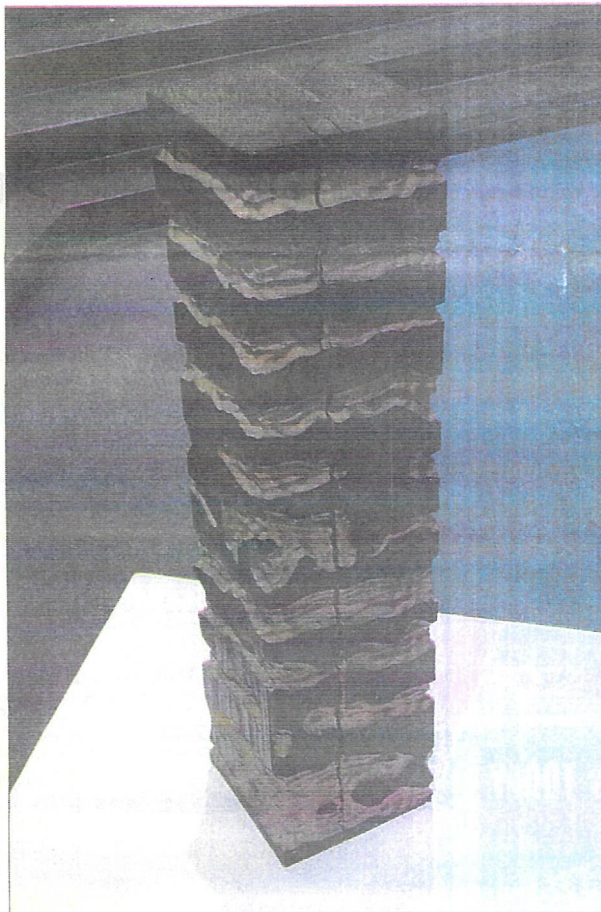
ticity in art? Susan Hardesty, curator of the Norwalk Community College Gallery, answers the very question she poses through the material presented in "The Craft of Art," on view until Jan. 20.

The exhibition contains eight works created from nontraditional materials by emerging and mid-career artists, mostly from Fairfield County. In a welcome departure, Hardesty has included labels consisting of artist statements relating the process by which craft becomes a work of art. This interchange makes for a show as timely as it is thought-provoking.

Concept and craft seamlessly merge in "Towels" by Emma Luna, a native of the Dominican Republic. The California artist has created an optical illusion with a work of startling simplicity and elegance. "Towels" is a replica of her grandmother's terry cloths molded in clay with such realism that they appear to be the real thing. The work heals the split between conceptual art and craft through the formal realization of Duchamp's "optical art," celebrating the marriage between mind and body, where memories are stored.

Donna Sharrett and Nelle Tresselt weave repetitions of symbols into integrated wholes in the form of intricate and engaging mandalas. Sharrett uses traditional needlework techniques for "Memento," a narrative of family connection through elegant constructions of rose petals, glass beads and synthetic hair. Tresselt's "Eye Witness/Finger Pointing" is a hand-crafted paper collage in which figurative gestures are crafted into

Please see 'THE CRAFT OF ART,' Page D4



"Fingerprint Totem of Dan Cameron" by Alexander Garnett.



"Cedar Shingle Stacks" by Matthew Weber.

'The Craft of Art'

■ Continued from Page D3

universal expression through a dazzling integration of form and content.

Joseph Fucigna's "Get in My Belly" elevates industrial material into confrontational wall sculpture with a clearly defined aesthetic through the craft of weaving. Westport artist Ashley James transforms ceramic pots into innovative nonfunctional sculpture by way of large amorphous shapes and an original technique of untraditional acrylic glaze.

Alexander Garnett's "Fingerprint Totem of Dan Cameron" reveals the artist's cruder work before he honed his woodworking technique. Yet, evidence of the artist's own fingerprints in the making of the piece gives it a more human touch than recent works in the series, which begs the question of art receding into design when an artist pursues technical repetition after exhausting inventions of an original form.

The newest manner in which art and craft engage in dialogue are objects that transparently reveal the process by which

they are made. Matthew Weber achieves this feat by returning wooden construction material to its original form. His "Cedar Shingle Stacks" mold into the circular shapes of tree trunks in accordance to the environment, creating dialogue between organic and industrial forms.

David Boyajian attempts this goal with a considerably more rigid material — steel — that the artist struggles to weld into his concept through domination rather than an engaging in collaboration. Yet, the failure of the sculptor's "Desire" to evoke anything but the tension between the artist and his material reveals the gulf separating finely crafted objects from fine art. Art needs to communicate a vision of human expression, while the only message in craft is the "look at me" show-off attitude emanating from skill.

"The Craft of Art" will be on view until Jan. 20 on the east campus of Norwalk Community College, 188 Richards Ave., Norwalk. Gallery hours are Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-noon. Call 857-3323.

