NY/8

Brad A. Edell
G. Gerry Griffin
Brower Hatcher
Pedro Lujan
Mike Metz
Robert Stackhouse
Norman Tuck
Ursula von Rydingsvard
It is with great enthusiasm that the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery presents the exhibition NY/8. This is one of a series of New York State showcase exhibitions sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts at the Lowe Art Gallery. Each show brings together the work of resident artists of New York State who have not in recent years enjoyed major exposure in the New York City art scene, and provides for them visibility in central New York.

NY/8 was organized by Jason D. Wong, Curator of the Lowe Art Gallery, who selected eight sculptors working predominantly in the medium of wood. The works represent a wide range of diverse aesthetic sensibilities in dealing with the same medium.

I would like to thank Professor Wong for organizing this exhibition and for the extensive search he made in bringing these exciting sculptures to Syracuse. I would also like to express our special appreciation to the New York State Council on the Arts for its continued support of this program and the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery.

Joseph A. Scala
Director

After decades of dramatic and frequent incursions upon unfamiliar aesthetic territory it appears that now, on the threshold of the 1980s, artists are assimilating and building upon their newly won demesne. We see in current art that concepts, once distinguished from one another, have melded in unforeseen, recombinant forms. These art forms draw from the far and recent past, from innovations since the 1940s and from the preceding centuries of American art.

The present exhibition has not been organized to support a proposition, however each object provokes interesting observations. At first view, these works, created since 1975, might strike the viewer as peculiar mutants, an assembly of things that are foreign to the phylogeny of art history.

It seems clear that these and many other contemporary wood sculptors are not attempting to make objects that align with recent theories, those of the Abstract Expressionists, Pop artists, Minimalists, Body artists, Earthwork artists or Conceptualists. Their objects do not occupy well-defined positions within the scope of recent art: the sculpture of Julio Gonzales, David Smith, Tony Caro, Robert Grosvenor, Don Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson or Christo.

The works on view represent, instead, an historical spread that includes the wood carving of Constantin Brancusi, who made everything with his own hands in the tradition of the peasants in his native Romania; the work of Louise Bourgeois, one of the early experimenters in wood who carved and constructed non-objective structures and Gabriel Kohn, who in the early 1950s experimented with techniques used by carpenters...
and shipbuilders, bending wood to create volumes and shapes that seemed to defy gravity and rise into space. Other associations may be made to the tribal sculpture of indigenous American peoples, or to the early American Folk Art tradition, which developed independently from formal art and produced, thereby, an art for self-satisfaction rather than academic tradition. And the Constructivists of the 1920s, as will be shown later, remain a significant influence on today's sculptors. Why are the major innovations of the 1960s conspicuously inconspicuous here?

The impact of the 60s derived its greatest force from art scaled to environmental proportions, often utilizing enormous materials, both technological and natural. The art of Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt and others was, in measure and truth, as real as life itself. Its affinity was to technology, free of the subjective values that animated earlier art. By the end of the 1960s, a vast aesthetic defoliation had been wrought across the visual landscape in a purge that had been described as an unremitting process of purification. The self-concern, evident among the Abstract Expressionists was replaced with a new objectification that sought to isolate the essence of art. In music, dance and the plastic arts, a new appreciation for concrete art (that which is completely conceived beforehand) led to Minimal Art and the exclusion of visually superfluous elements to gain maximum pictorial effect. The result was an intellectual experience that left behind human feelings, emotions and an intimate identification between object and maker. Once the sculptor required technology to create his art, he was relegated to the position of planner. The resulting distance between creator and creation was a gap that was familiar to industry, but in the world of the plastic arts, its ramifications could not have been fully anticipated. Gregoire Müller hailed the new dissipative art in his text for The New Avant-Garde. As for other artists who were using simple raw materials such as wood and rope, he considered them reactionary, returning to a "primitive notion of art."

Müller discounted this activity's significance by falling to ask why were artists, in the 1970s, finding an alternative to cool, intellectual, value-free art so compelling. How was it that with the recognition of art as a new continuum of concepts, words, images, behavior, body motion, time, space; the forces of nature and civic enterprise—at a heightened moment of art's acceptance to life's broadest proportions—could there have been an equally vigorous investment in the opposite direction? Body Art. Dennis Oppenheim worked in both worlds, creating enormous environmental "performances" and black/white films of intimate attacks upon his hand. Out of a milieu of theorization, an emergent concern with self in relationship to the aesthetic experience was perhaps inevitable. The reflective Body works of Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Chris Burden and Lucas Samaras re-established links between the physical/emotional components of life and the creative impulse. The objects in this exhibition by Brad Ettel, Gerry Griffin, Brower Hatcher, Pedro Lujan, Mike Metz, Robert Stackhouse, Norman Tuck and Ursula von Rydingsvard may be seen as never expressions in that same reflective current, sharing in varying degrees the following characteristics:

1. the use of an ancient medium for its basic properties
2. a handmade quality that relates to craft sensibility
3. an archetypal form for subjective rather than intellectual expressiveness
4. a discrete object
5. a studio-art objectness, at human scale
6. an Independence from mainstream theories
7. a dissociation with industrial and technological sophistication
8. a synthesis of diverse aesthetic notions
9. a practical rather than theoretical attitude
10. an appeal to pleasure rather than intellectual dispassion

The art of Ursula von Rydingsvard celebrates the visual sensuality of wood, its color, grain and the effect of light upon its surface textures. The art of Britannie Stackhouse may be seen as "Song of a Saint." This, and her untitled work, are archetypal, as is the work of Stackhouse, in the sense that many associations will spark in the minds of viewers. The objects speak a universal language without
specificity. Stackhouse sees his forms
as catalysts that induce personal
interpretations. With this in mind, he
creates generalized shapes that
suggest the forms of architecture and
ships hulls. Ancient myths, rituals or
ceremonies may be associated with
these creations and with Griffen’s “Star
Trap” and Lujan’s “Condor.” Rich in
allusions and echoes from foreign
cultures, the work of Stackhouse in his
own estimation makes no claim on
influences from the annals of art
history. To be sure, this art may be
valued as a personal evocation, drawn
from the collective unconscious.
Mike Metz claims a wide range of
influences upon his sculpture, among
them: The Abrambersio Church, 1850-
82, Appolinarii Vasebotv; Tree, 1918,
Giacomo Ballo: The Gate of the Kksis,
1925-38, Constantin Brancusi; Slim
Ankle, 1930, Kurt Schwitters; Dynaxion
Car, 1932, Buckminster Fuller; steel and
gestone object sculptures 1955-78, Cases
Oldenburg; Franklin Court, 1972-79.
Richard Tufte.
Metz’s objects are, in his words,
“experience made into furniture.” The
cement surfaces impart a sense of
solidity, but the underlying skeletal form
of wood subverts the impression. The
objects then take their true role as
props and symbols of reality. He writes:
“My products are reminders I was
trained by the tools I was given.
My products are markers of my
resistance.
My products subvert my training.
My products are copied from
memory.
My products are obvious.
My products are nothing new.
My products are less than what they
copy.
My products have no reason except
in comparison.
My products are not revolutionary.
My products are living in a world of
objects.
My products offer relief.
My products are models for those
who understand nothing.”
Brad Edell speaks similarly of his
own objects and his posture of
detachment. In response to our query,
he returned a sketchy, scribbled
biography that cited only his birthdate,
his incomplete schooling, a couple of
shows in which he participated, and the
fact that he had been a cook “on and
off” on a fishing boat. Edell’s
nonchalance in these matters is
symptomatic of his indifference to the
so-called serious art scene that
assumes sophistication is requisite to
the understanding and enjoyment of
art. If not a universal language, his art
aims for universal pleasure through
the natural beauty of its woods and
through kinetics. His stolid forms
appear to have the formal remove of
high art, but they are toys in disguise.
With Calder-like humor, they roll and
roll unpredictably in response to a
viewer’s manipulation. Once in motion,
they look as though they are
attempting to overcompensate for a
sober appearance. Disavowing any
relationship to art historical
movements, Edell concerns himself
with populist aims and simply making
his objects work. His choice of wood
for the sculptural medium expresses his
ambivalence toward contemporary
technology.
Norman Tuck’s kinetic work is also
basic and uncomplicated, spurns
comparisons to technology and
depends on an intimate relationship—a
one-to-one involvement—between
viewer and object. Jeffrey Wechsler has
described this work as “tinker-toy
purism,” the thrill of designing con-
traptions that are characteristically
straightforward and ingenious. Form
follows function. There are no extra-
near parts in Tuck’s sculpture. This
reductivism expresses more than a
precept; it is a matter of mechanical
integrity, a practical attitude rather than
a theoretical or philosophical one.
Tuck acknowledges a debt to the
Constructivists, whose kinetic
sculptures and Manifesto regarding the
essential of time and space gave rise to sculptural forms that
dispersed with solid volume, as if
heretofore had been known. Tuck’s
work recalls a 1922 kinetic sculpture by
Naum Gabo that introduced the
concept of “virtual volume,” achieved
through motion. The “fingers” of Tuck’s
sculpture waltz up and down, visually
defining a voluminous swath of varying
size, depending on the participant’s
efforts.
Pedro Lujan feels strongly
influenced by the Baroque churches he
has seen in Quito, Equador, where
200 years of mixed foreign influences
have flowered in intricately carved
iconography. Another source for Lujan
is the southwestern folk carvings of
santos which, for him, communicate
through feelings. Lujan favors this
ancient kinship between the
handcrafted object and its emotive
communication. His sculpture evolves
from a pre-Constructivist, indeed
ancient syntax, but not without a
modern accent signified in fragile
components, suspended in space,
loosely relational—characteristics shared
by the work of Brower Hatcher.
There is an immediacy about
Brower Hatcher’s sculpture which
relates to its visual properties. It is
almost incorporeal and has been
described by Andrew Kagan as
atmospheric. Still, the visual pleasure
is in an object that recombines notions of material distribution, pattern and visual illusion. It recalls Umberto Boccioni's vision for a sculpture aimed at pure sensation. Other Constructivists had intended that sculpture should enclose space with the most ephemeral substance possible, but their idea, an integration of space and matter, is realized here. Hatcher constructs his sculpture from familiar, recognizable parts and, in the mode of syncretist, hopes to reinvent the order of things to arrive at structures not previously known. His work concerns itself with "thingness," discrete entities, their qualities and structure. "Every part of the work," Hatcher states, "is an object: it is recognizable and familiar...they are both real structures and metaphorical structures and speak formally within themselves, but also through the way they invite you to remember and recognize. They stand as monuments (to publicly remember how things are in the world)." Hatcher links his works to grids, structural spans, molecular fields, geometry, architecture and to formalist propositions. Hatcher sees his work as ancient and modern, a dialect within itself and in relation to the world, "a tinkertoy obelisk."

To some extent, Gerry Griffin's work also alludes to architectural structures and their characteristics. His materials are rattan, luan and cane and relate more to Stockhouse's symbolic constructs than to the explicitly architectural structures of such artists as Alice Adams, Siah Armajani, Alice Aycock, Ned Smyth, Edward Mayer or Michael Norton. Titled "Star Trap," it commends itself to the viewer's imagination for its meaning and function. It seems at once to be an arcane device and a decoration. At the very least it is a matrix for subjective responses.

There is a current wave of contemporary sculptors who utilize the medium of wood, and the eight artists in this exhibition make their contribution clear. If one were inclined to define a zeitgeist in which these artists work, it might be stated in terms of romanticism, symbolism and intimism. In a sense we are experiencing again the appreciation of intimacy and autobiographic, personal authenticity that was held by David Smith and other artists before the 1960s.

Harold Rosenberg who viewed art from a vast perspective, once suggested that Modern Art was a period style (e.g. Baroque Art) that would come to an end. Should that be so, it well might occur when artists find that they have fully answered Duchamp's demand for an art of ideas. Since Duchamp, there have been many aesthetic conceptions, founded on intellectual systems, and there have been others, less noticed, that recall the words of Benjamin De Casseres: "Every thought has its corresponding emotion...But there are aesthetic emotions for which there are no corresponding thoughts..."

It may be that art cannot be long removed from that "emotional" experience. It is not the intent of this exhibition, however, to speculate on the inevitable directions of art. In the context of this university art gallery, it is germane to present works that adduce new options, syntheses and alternatives, now and for the future.

J.D.W.

1. Müller, Grégoire. The New Avant-Garde, Issues for the Art of the 70s (New York: Praeger, 1973). To illuminate art of the late 1960s, Müller pointed to Warhol's work as an exemplar, stating, "He was the first to integrate fully into his work as untreated facts the most diverse aspects of contemporary life, and to look bluntly at everything without giving a personal or moral judgement...After Warhol, such problems as 'beautiful' or 'ugly,' 'good,' 'bad,' 'optimistic,' 'pessimistic,' and many others, have become old-fashioned to the point of somehow being distasteful and dishonest for an artist." p. 7.

2. ibid., p. 23.


Ursula von Rydingsvard
"Song of a Saint I"

Photo: David Allison
Robert Stackhouse
"Sailing the High Reaches"

Photo: Mary Beth Edelson

Brower Hatcher
untitled

Photo: Jonathan Barber
Norman Tuck
"Finger Piece"

G. Gerry Griffin
"Star Trap for Crab Nebulae"

Photo: Artist
Mike Metz
“Barge / truck / cash register...”

Photo Wayne Groffk

Pedro Lujan
“Condor”

Photo: Artist
CATALOGUE

Brad Edell
*untitled, 1978
Purpleheart wood
102" x 120" x 26"

Gerry Griffin
* "Star Trap for Crab Nebulae" 1978
Rattan, birch, Iber
40" x 60"

Luain
untitled, 1978-79
Luan
50" x 24" x 12"

Brower Hatcher
*untitled, 1979
Wood, wire
66" x 120" x 120"

Pedro Lujan
* "Condor" 1979
Greenheart, whitepine
120" x 192" x 108"

Mike Metz
* "barge / truck / cash register..." 1979
Wood, cement
21" x 14" x 22"

Robert Stackhouse
*12. "Sailing the High Reaches"
Oak, paint
146" x 120" x 26"

Dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width and depth.

*Illustrated

BGIOGRAPHIES

BRAD A. EDELL
Born Brooklyn, New York 1950
Education
1976-78 Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York City
1971-73 Hunter College, New York City
1968-70 SUNY, Buffalo, New York
Group Exhibitions
1977 "Brooklyn '77. The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

G. GERRY GRIFFIN
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Education
1966 Art Institute of Chicago, M.F.A.
1962 Art Institute of Chicago, B.F.A.
Solo Exhibitions
1978 "Trapped at P.S.1," P.S.1, New York City
1978 Robert Freidus Gallery, New York City
1978 Syracuse University Lubin House, New York City
Group Exhibitions
1979 "Wall Works," Center for International Arts, New York City
1978 "Harmony and Dissonance." Lincoln Center, New York City
1971 100 Acres Gallery, New York City
1969 Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

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Born Atlanta, Georgia 1942
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1963-67 Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, B.A., Industrial Design
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1975, 73 Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York City

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1979 Cayman Gallery, New York City
1977 Rahinovitch and Guerra Gallery, New York City
1977 Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York City
Group Exhibitions
1979 Eversion Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
1978-79 "Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition," Ward Island, New York City

NORMAN TUCK
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1976-78 Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York City
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1975, 73 Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York City

Group Exhibitions
1979 Prospect Mountain Sculpture Show, Lake George, New York
1979 Diane Brown Sculpture Space, Washington, D.C.
1978 "15 Sculptors in Steel Around Bennington 1963-75," Park-
McCullough House Association, North Bennington, Vermont
1977 "Sculpture Space," Munson-
Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York
1974 "Monumenta," summer sculpture festival, Newport, Rhode Island
1972 "Objects and Documents," Art Council of Great Britain, London and throughout Great Britain

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1977 Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York City
Group Exhibitions
1979 Eversion Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
1978-79 "Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition," Ward Island, New York City
1978 Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California
1978 Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico
1977 National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
1976, 75 Robinovitch and Guerra Gallery, New York City
1972 Walter Marlowe Gallery, New York City

MIKE METZ
Born New York City 1945

Education
1963-67 Art Institute of Miami

Solo Exhibitions
1979 Nobé Gallery, New York City
1973 "Drawing Power," James Yu Gallery, New York City
1972 "Drawing Power," Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

Group Exhibitions
1978 "Tues 'N Towne," Nobé Gallery, New York City
1978 "Artwords and Bookworks," Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
1978 "Difficult Decisions/ Ethical Dilemmas," University of Minnesota, Duluth, Minnesota
1976 "Mike Metz/ Alan Sondheim," Committee for the Visual Arts, Franklin Furnace, New York
1974 "Artists Books," University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, California
1973 "Art and Idea II," Museum of Aalst, Aalst, Belgium
1972 "Group Show," Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design, Nova Scotia, Canada

ROBERT STACKHOUSE
Born Bronxville, New York 1942

Education
1967 University of Maryland, M.A.
1965 University of South Florida, B.A.

Solo Exhibitions
1979, 76 Dobruch, Chicago, Illinois
1979, 76 Sculpture Now, New York City
1973, 72 Herri Gallery, Washington, D.C.
1973 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Group Exhibitions
1979 "Maquettes and Drawings," Feigelson-Rosenstein Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
1978 "Sculptor's Drawings," Touchstone Gallery, New York City
1977 "Drawings of the 70s," Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
1977 "Scale and Environment: 10 Sculptors," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1975 "Recent Acquisitions," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

NORMAN TUCK
Born Lebanon, Pennsylvania 1945

Education
1970-72 Pennsylvania State University, University Park, M.F.A.
1963-65 University of Florida, Gainesville, B.F.A.

Solo Exhibitions
1978 Wakeforest University Art Gallery, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
1977, 74 O.K. Harris Gallery, New York City

Group Exhibitions
1978 "Contemporary Artists Series, Number I II," Rutgers University Art Gallery, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1974 "New York Artists on Tour II," traveling exhibition, World Trade Center, New York City

1973 "New York Artists on Tour III," traveling exhibition, World Trade Center, New York City

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD
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Education
1973-75 Columbia University, New York City, M.F.A.
1974-76 University of Miami, Coral Gables, M.A.
1962-64 University of Miami, Coral Gables, B.A.

Solo Exhibitions
1979 55 Mercer, New York City
1978 Robert Freidus Gallery, New York City
1978 "Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition," Ward Island, New York City
1978 "Small Works," 55 Mercer, New York City
1976 "This Doesn't Look Like a Work of Art II," Truman Gallery, New York City
1975 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
1975 Columbia University, New York City

Group Exhibitions
1978 Wave Hill, Bronx, New York, outdoor sculpture
1978-79 "Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition," Ward Island, New York City
1978 "Small Works," 55 Mercer, New York City
1976 "This Doesn't Look Like a Work of Art II," Truman Gallery, New York City
1975 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
1975 Columbia University, New York City
We wish to express our gratitude to the artists who generously cooperated in the organization of this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue. A debt of thanks is due Nancy Kaufman and the Creative Artists Public Service Program, New York City, for availing invaluable resources for the review of works by New York State artists. Special appreciation is expressed to April Storms, Paula Radding and Paula Edelsack, who provided curatorial assistance in the preparation of the catalogue.

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