

# Artweek



■ The New Exhibition ■ H. C. Westermann ■ Pat Warner ■ Michihiro Kosuge

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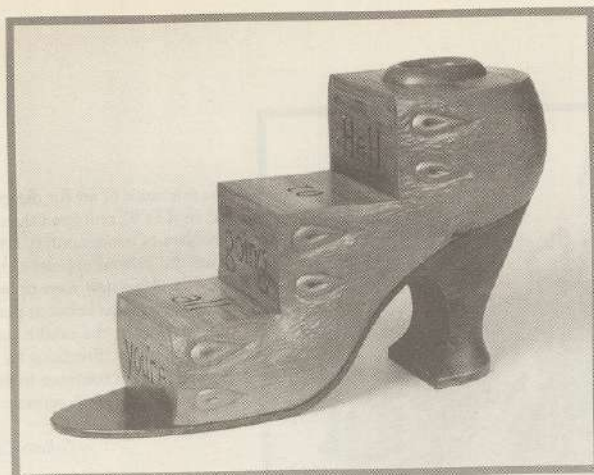


the ways shoes reveal our desires and the attempted purchase and exchange of specific identities.

The most successful pieces in the show are those which go beyond excellent craft, elegant design, and clever wit to embark on journeys intended to unravel the social meanings potentially embedded in shoes.

The best of these works investigate in various ways issues involving the construction of memory, class, and gender to create what function as individual and collective "shoe-portraits." Artist/shoemaker Gaza Bowen's *Shoes for the Angry Little Woman* combines humor and bite, setting an imposing pair of red-handled-steak-knife stiletto heels on an altar-like stage garlanded with prickly red thorns and skirted with dainty red embroidery on white cloth. Simultaneously imposing and playful is Amalia Mesa-Bains's *The Shoes Only a Woman Can Fill*, an enormous Cinderella-like open mesh wire slipper studded with fake jewels, designed for an imagined warrior whose spirit and power has outgrown society. The scale is terrific, though she'll be needing a more practical shoe for the battlefield.

Hilda Shum's *Bound Feet* includes a tiny silk-embroidered slipper as one element in a dramatic and painful installation dealing with the history of foot binding in China. Various ambiguous and graphic large-scale black-and-white photographs are juxtaposed, creating disturbing associations between the bound feet of women, the wrapping of meat, animal hooves and sexual pleasure. Within this context, the beautiful and delicate slipper becomes a source of horror, a shoe designed for a grown woman who has nowhere to go and no means to get there.



Top: Walter Robinson, *Repent*, 1996, alder, gumwood, 15" x 24" x 9". (Photo: Marly Sohl). Bottom: Nöle Giuliani, *Untitled (Shoes)*, 1990, dried banana peels, red thread, myrrh resin, at the Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek.

Also stuck with nowhere to go are the caged white little-girl party shoes of Amy Wilson's *Sanctuary*. A symbol of childhood innocence and fantasy is disconcertingly entrapped rather than set free. The shoes which belong to Ray Beldner's *E Pluribus Unum* could go somewhere, but they won't, stuck as they are in a world of corporate conformity. Eight pairs of nearly identical men's black oxfords surround a pile of nickels. Free to walk the streets of commerce, they fan out in a circle, each one bearing a letter belonging to the team. Their outward-facing position suggests release, yet they are seemingly magnetized to the pile of nickels, metaphorically bound to the corporate body. Their position is somewhat reminiscent of the circling which occurs in a football huddle, or the beginning of a folk dance, but one has the sense that their inevitable return to the center will be motivated by fear rather than community.

Nöle Giuliani's brown, ancient-looking elf-like shoes, stitched together from banana peels, speak of passages through time and space. Delicate and ephemeral, magical journeys across cultures are evoked in an effective melding of material and form. Also suggestive of border crossings are Yoshitomo Saito's *East and West The Rivers*, a huge pair of bronze boat-like shoes metaphorically ready for travel. "When we walk, we discover

something," writes Saito.

*The Shoe Show* invites discovery. More interestingly, the exhibition also functions as a kind of theater in which the actors and their desires to be alternately sexually desirable, playful, adventurous, conformist, practical, or comfortable are revealed solely through their shoes. *The Shoe Show* invites viewers to walk in another person's shoes, demonstrating the potential richness of experience available through interaction with seemingly mundane utilitarian objects.

—Debra Koppman

*The Shoe Show* through November 2 at Bedford Gallery, Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr., Walnut Creek.

Debra Koppman is a visual artist based in Oakland.

## Southern California

### Crossing borders in inSITE97

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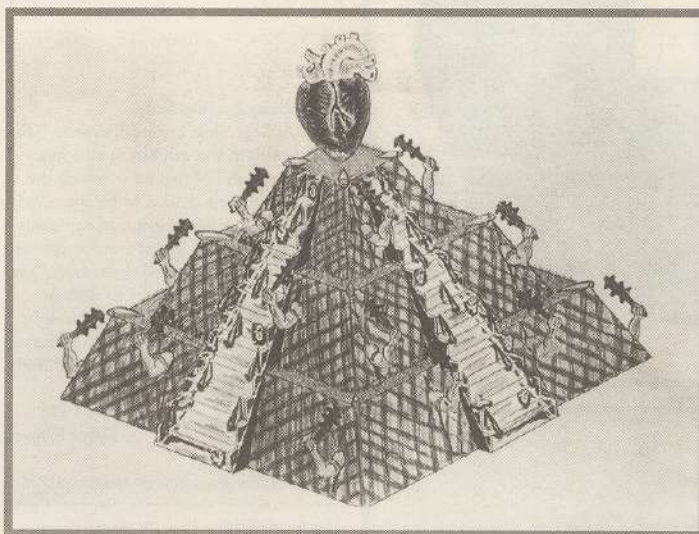
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"One of the things that the conjunction of San Diego and Tijuana dramatizes," as curator Yord suggested, "is the multiplicities of publics which any city or town has." Artists such as Simmons and Simpson explored, as Yord put it, the "thresholds between public and private" experience in common spaces. Simmons, for example, presented a video of a plane drawing snowflake patterns in the sky, establishing ephemeral, personal gestures within a public space. Other artists

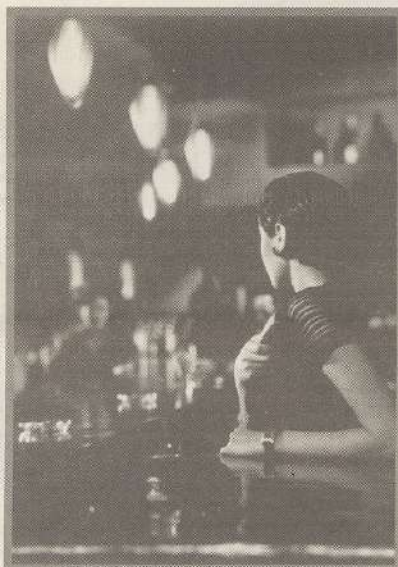


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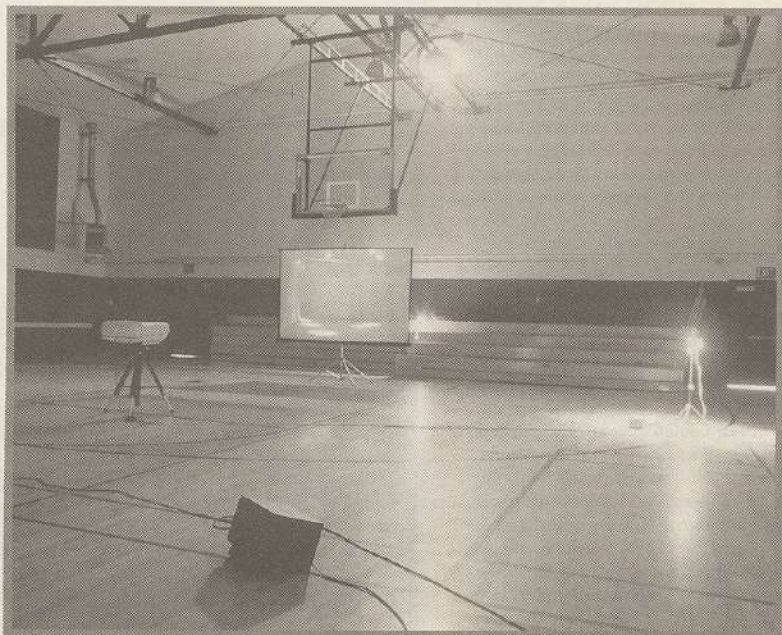


Clockwise from above: Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *El Niño*, proposal for installation; Lorna Simpson, still from *Call Waiting*, film, in San Diego; Doug Ischar, *Drill*, at Dolores Magdalena Memorial Recreation Center, San Diego. (Photo: Jimmy Fluker.); Deborah Small, digital projection of *Rowing in Eden*, installation, in San Diego.



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the relevance of art for the general public, inSITE97 redressed the ongoing problem of contemporary art's isolation from the general populace. At the same time, probing new ways of investigating the relationships between personal and public spheres, the exhibit suggested promising new directions for the global discourses that continue to unfold at the end of the twentieth century.

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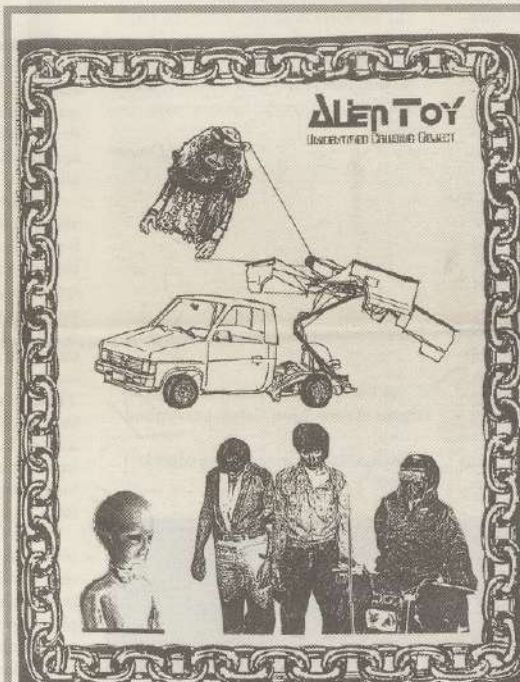


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While not all work addressed the border, most of it did resonate in some way with local or cultural issues. Doug Ischar grew up in San Diego. He takes over

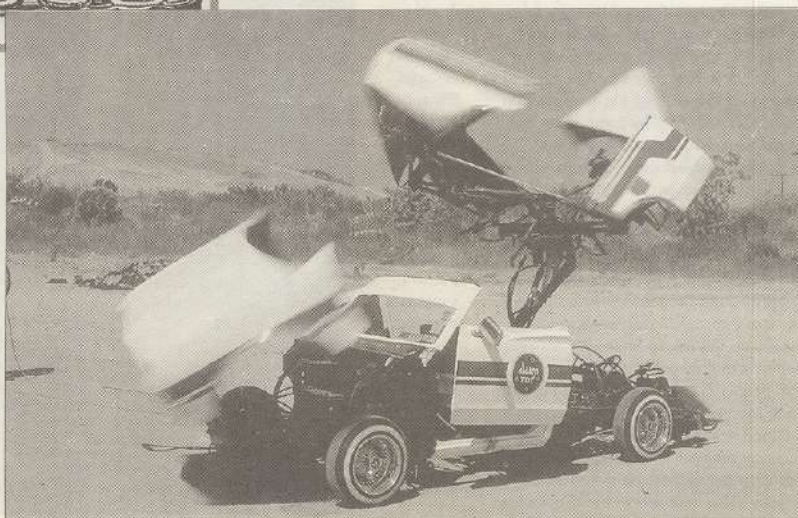
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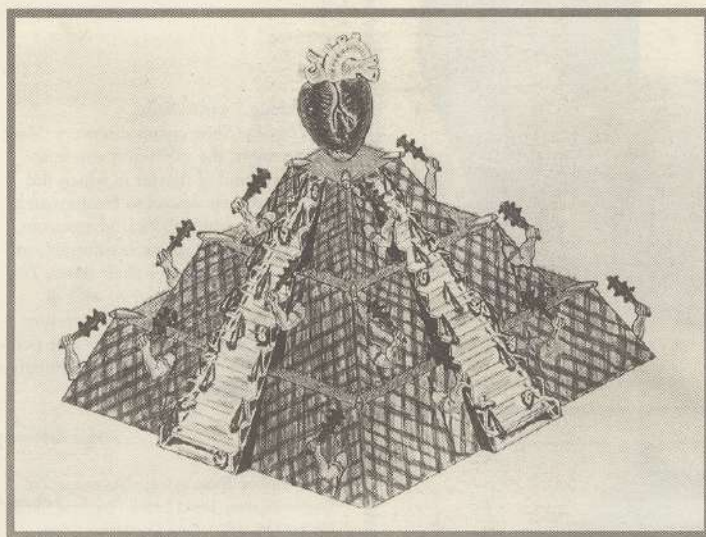
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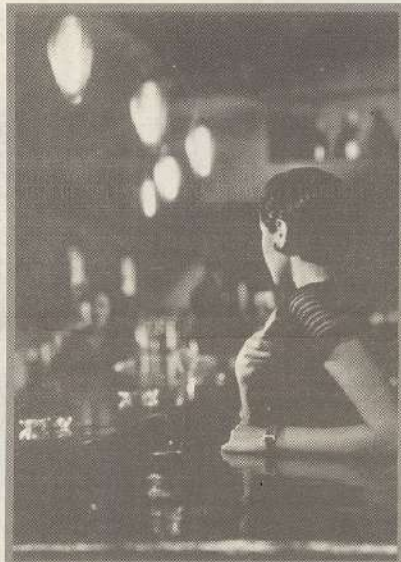


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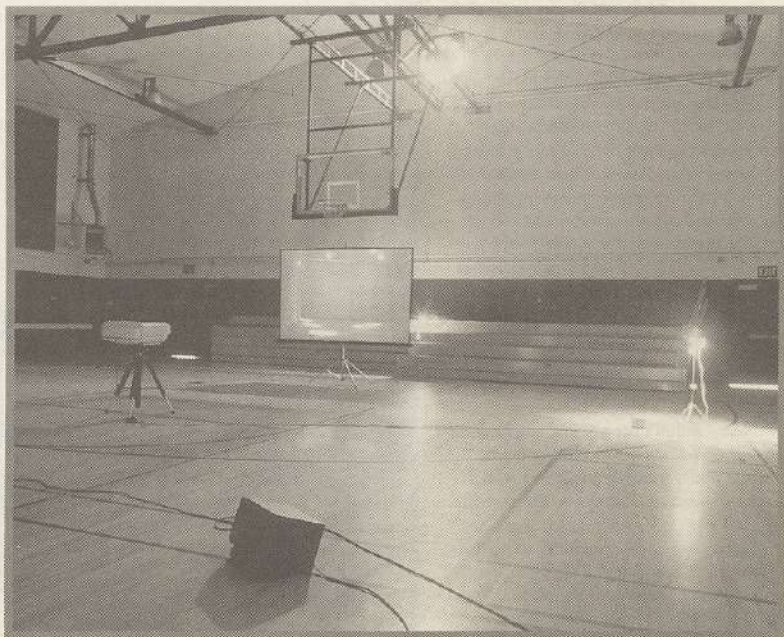


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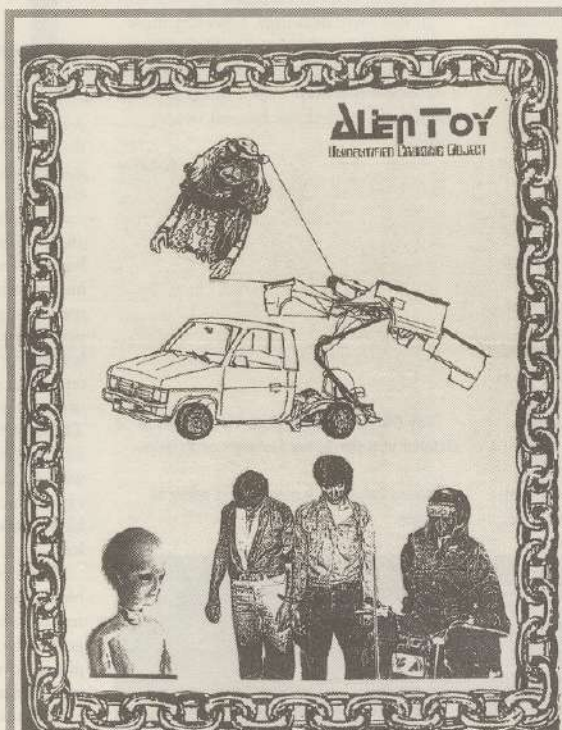
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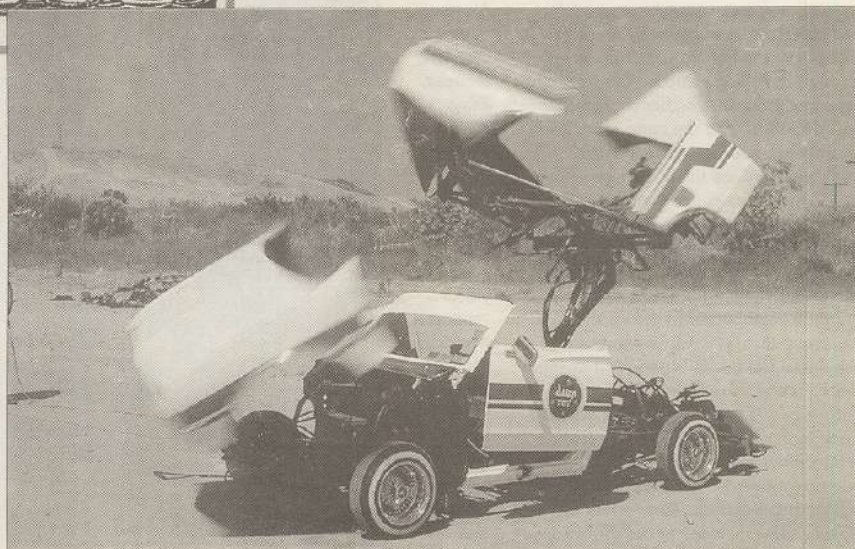
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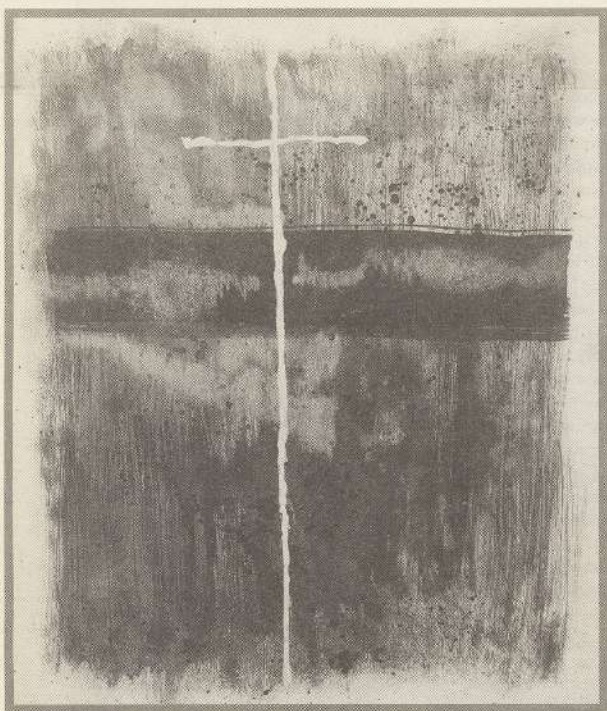


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## Reviews



Jay DeFeo (above) *Untitled (Florence)*, 1952, paint on paper, 14" x 12-1/2"; (below) *Untitled (Florence)*, 1952, tempera on paper, 24" x 21-1/4", at Kohn Turner Gallery, Los Angeles.

### Jay DeFeo at Kohn Turner Gallery

In my eyes Jay DeFeo has always been a minor artist. Her immersion in the beatnik scene and her absorption of the Beats' pseudo-spiritual posing and their shallow, promiscuous eclecticism were fatal to her work, reducing it to a mere marker of a moment in cultural fashion. Her utterly misguided six-year absorption in a single painting, *The Rose* (whose sheer poundage, combined with its entombment behind a wall at the San Francisco Art Institute, transformed it into a fabulous object) stunted her as painter. Ultimately, the burden of her quest for the mythic greatly exceeded her capabilities as an artist, forcing her to trowel on her symbolism with the same heavy hand as her paint, with results that often resemble oversized thrift store paintings.

The works on paper that I saw at Kohn Turner dated from the very beginning of her career and while they did not change my estimate of this artist, they did provide a poignant glimpse at what was going through her mind before she took the wrong turn. On display were a dozen samples of the ink and tempera drawings DeFeo brought back with her from Europe in 1952 after spending a year and a half in Paris and Florence. She had obtained her master's degree from UC Berkeley the year before, so these works represent her earliest post-student body of work. Also included in the show were

black ink washes and a delicate, loose, calligraphy that she would later suppress. The most "Florentine" of these drawings (all untitled) combined a lovely, washy "gold" ground with a vaguely anthropomorphic tangle of black, brushy lines. Others appeared more heavily worked. An opaque undercoat of dark brown tempera and a varnish of glossy acrylic give one of these drawings the appearance of an old oil painting. Another, done a year later (untitled [New York], 1953) employs a partially obscured page from a newspaper to support a percussive grouping of red and black brush marks.

The portentous

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a couple of oil paintings, an early one from 1952 done before she moved to San Francisco, and one from 1958, which displays her signature impasto style.

The inclusion of this latter painting, titled *Song of Innocence*, a work which is at once pretentious, glib, overworked and blandly decorative, serves unwittingly to set off the promising freshness of earlier work in which she demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the textural possibilities of

banality DeFeo would later descend to in her search for important content is visible in a drawing that superimposes a thin white cross over a velvety background, with a cruciform structure composed of a raft of vertical brush marks crossed by a darker horizontal band. The white cross is not only superfluous but actually destroys an otherwise self-sufficient and subtle drawing. This particular work derives added historical significance by seeming to presage DeFeo's 1954 assemblage consisting of a 12-foot cross wrapped in butcher paper, embellished with a glass jewel and tempera. Presented at the annual drawing and print show at the San Francisco Museum of Art, it touched off a furor. That event could only have encouraged DeFeo's worst tendencies to emerge.

In her early drawings, however, those baneful traits are kept at bay by a devotion to the particulars of picture making, a devotion endowed with a sprightliness and a delicacy that age has not overcome.

—Mario Cutajar

Jay DeFeo—*The Florence View* closed in October at Kohn Turner Gallery, Los Angeles.

Mario Cutajar is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.



### Pat Warner at Beckstrand Gallery

*The labyrinth is then a symbol of life itself—the Dream in which we live, with its unpredictable turns. In Hindu and Buddhist outlooks, life is maya, illusion, a constructed dream—our cortical awareness, consciousness, or construction of reality...*

—Alan Bleakley, *Fruits of the Moon Tree: The Medicine Wheel and Transpersonal Psychology*

Labyrinths are corridors meant to be walked, and in them a journey has meaning. It is this fundamental, but very tangible truth which animates

Pat Warner's recent maze installation. *Enter, Walk, Listen* is spare and, in some ways, dark. It mixes a vision of ecological dread with a healthy dose of romantic appreciation for ordered nature and nostalgic tree-lined byways.

The piece hinges very subtly on the ancient mnemonic device of using the body to encourage recall. In the ages before writing was widely known, long speeches, genealogies or important events would be memorized by repeatedly walking a winding path through a temple or garden and mentally placing ordered information along the way. These spirals and walks were blank-slate storage devices made of real space, filled with all the mysterious power and importance of exact recall at a time when history and knowledge could so easily be lost.

In its repetition and uncluttered blankness Warner's spiral of eighty-five ten-foot-tall wooden tree forms winding gently in on itself is itself a refined, simplified format onto which it is easy to project all kinds of memories of tree-covered roads. Part meandering glen, part barren winter forest, the leafless carved limbs stretch out or up, exuding a strange mixture of protection and utter desolation. At the center of the sparse copse the vertical tree forms are thinner in mass, suggesting long, curving, whittled sticks or reeds drawn together in a gentle bower. They encircle a floor of pale, unsophisticated images of endangered local flora and fauna, painted on small Masonite tiles by local elders and children. Walking on the small paintings at the heart of the labyrinth's sheltering wheel pointedly mixes feelings of security with a sense of transgression and vandalism. It's a duality of comfort and tension which was never as clearly distilled or as gently telegraphed by Warner's previous maze installations.

Labyrinths, like installations in general, are meant to be transgressed. In these spaces human occupation and movement engenders meaning. In the