

THE ARTS

Hurlbut's classical work has eyes for ritual

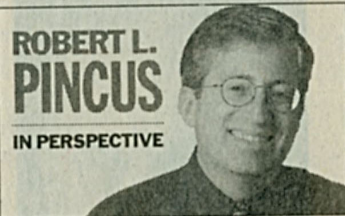
Spring Hurlbut's art looks a lot like the kind of architectural ornamentation you'd find on a vintage bank or government edifice. But there are marked differences between the typical classically inspired entablature and her version of the same. Hurlbut's contains body or animal parts: eyes, eggs, bones and even tongues.

Not organic matter in every case, of course. But the effect is consistently startling.

She isn't creating that sort of work to be sensationalistic. Hurlbut, well-versed in scholarship about classical architecture, believes it has sources in pagan ritual. And to render vivid the notion that classical architecture may have evolved from such sites of sacrifice, she inserts human and animal symbolism into otherwise austere ornamentation.

"This is one of the speculations about how entablature came into being. And though I admit that this is speculation, I think history is speculation."

That sort of speculation clearly fires the imagination of the soft-spoken and articulate artist. And several of her sculptures go on view tonight, at SDSU's University Art Gallery, in an exhibition called "Re-



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IN PERSPECTIVE

constructing Ritual." The other artists in the show are Francis Aly's and Jamex and Einar de la Torre; all four are represented in inSITE97, too, and a reception for them is being held at SDSU from 7 to 9 p.m.

Earlier this week, a pair of assistants were holding a piece by Hurlbut aloft, while the artist and gallery director Tina Yapelli decided how high it should sit on the wall. The sculpture in question, while austere classical, contains a typically non-classical feature: a row of horse teeth, tinged the dull reddish-brown of dried blood.

"It's got quite a dramatic title to it," observed Hurlbut, looking industrious in her black overalls. "It's called 'The Ritual Scream.'"

The 45-year-old artist, who lives and works in her native Toronto, probably wouldn't have a chance to

assist with the installation of her work at SDSU. But she's also here for inSITE97, the epic exhibition opening Sept. 26 across San Diego and Tijuana. (Sunday's Arts section will preview inSITE97.)

Two large-scale works made specifically for the big show will soon go on view in Tijuana's Casa de la Cultura. One, "Auto-Sacrifice," resembles a Doric column that suggests the human form. The other, "The Serpent Column," draws upon Greek and Aztec mythology for its imagery.

Taken together, the selections at both locales represent her output in the '90s — the decade, in Hurlbut's view, in which she has produced her finest work.

Nor is she the only Canadian artist to contribute to inSITE97. The influence of one of the inSITE97 curators, the Toronto-based Jessica Bradley, is reflected in the list of 50 artists. There are four more Canadians: two from the Toronto area (Kim Adams and Rebecca Belmore) and a pair from Vancouver (Ken Lum and Liz Magor).

At SDSU, Hurlbut is exhibiting works that have been seen in Toronto and New York. Teeth appear

in "The Sacred Denticils" as well as "The Ritual Scream," to make the point that denticils — straight-edge notches that often appear between moldings in classical and classically inspired architecture — may have been inspired by rows of suspended teeth at sacrificial sites. Glass eyes line her "Eye and Dart Entablature," as a spooky reminder of the victims of sacrifice.

"They should look like plausible ornamentation," she says.

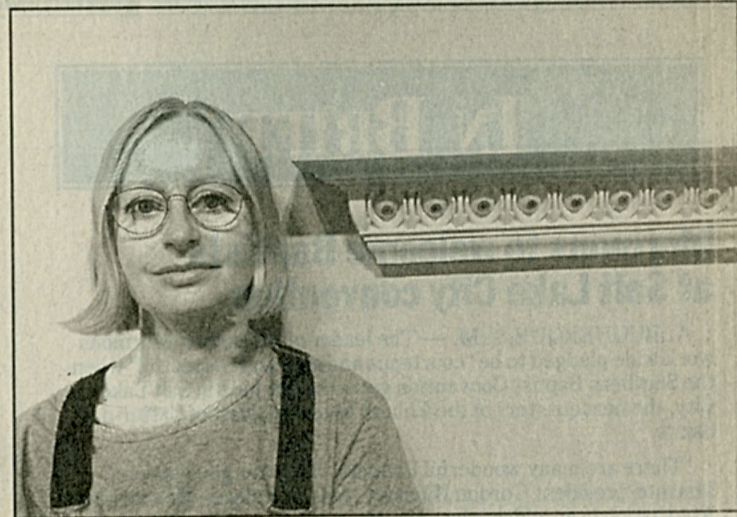
"But again," she cautions, "this is my interpretation of history, my own unraveling of the past."

Hurlbut didn't always make work that looked like that. But she has long gravitated toward art that spins variations on classical architecture.

Reading a book by art historian George Hersey, "The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture," triggered the major breakthrough in her work. That was eight years ago.

"It was his point that classical ornamentation comes out of the human body. And I wanted to find a way of concretizing this idea, making it into something visually plausible."

(Hersey, who teaches at Yale, is



JERRY RIFE / Union-Tribune

Ocular architecture: Spring Hurlbut, an artist from Toronto, includes glass eyes and real horse teeth in classically styled entablature that explores the ritual roots of Greek culture.

now an admirer of Hurlbut's work and has written about it.)

For inSITE97, she's worked on a larger scale. Her Doric-inspired "Auto-Sacrifice" column stands about 10 feet tall. The second work, "The Serpent Column," has triggered another breakthrough for Hurlbut, a delving into myth in a way she hasn't before.

"I haven't quite formulated its effect yet," she observed. But Hurlbut makes it clear that another sea change for her art is imminent.

"Reconstructing Ritual" continues through Oct. 22. The gallery is open Monday through Thursday and on Saturday, 12 to 4 p.m. Call (619) 594-4941 or (619) 594-5171 for additional information. inSITE97 is on view Sept. 26 through Nov. 30. Call (619) 544-1482 for information.

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