

Campus Art Commentary

Extracted from Commentary by
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Humanities and Art

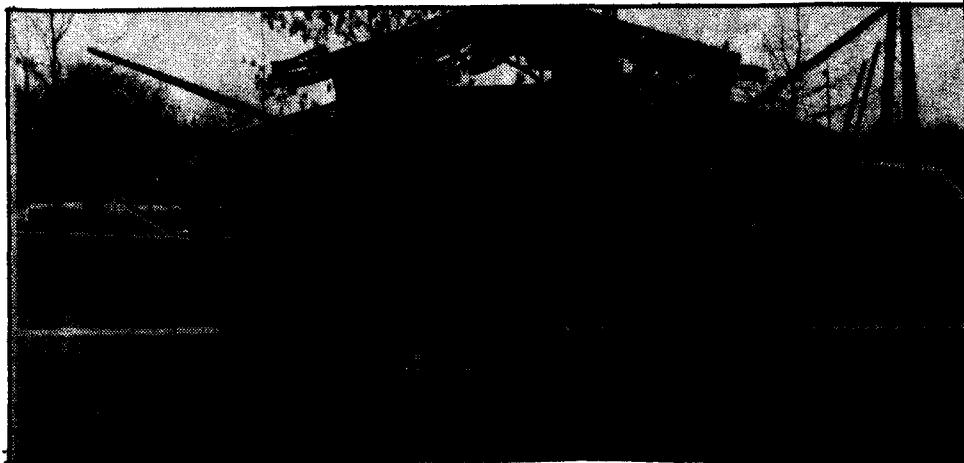
The exhibit (outdoor sculpture exhibition) is part of our Earth Day celebration, and several pieces in the show do indeed comment on the environment in some explicit way. But more generally, the idea behind the exhibit is the interaction of artists with the environment, how human beings can make positive statements that grace rather than disgrace nature. Some students have questioned the use of so-called industrial materials by some of the sculptors; I would simply ask them to use their eyes, without prejudice, before passing judgment. Let me make a suggestion: try to forget the industrial associations of steel, for example, and look at what is really happening: how shapes, sometimes graceful and sometimes powerful, interact in space; how color contrasts with the green grass background; how, in some works, the sky is reflected on smooth surfaces; how ideas (stretch your mind! they're there) talk to you through visual form. The following comments, briefly addressing each piece, are intended to help you look.

SCULPTURES BEHIND THE OLMSTED BUILDING

Duane McDiarmid, Even My Gentle

Steps/A Frightened Bear: The cabin-like construction (do you see a Japanese influence in its translucent walls?) is meant to be penetrated by the viewer--yes, you may walk in it. When you do, tiny bells attached to the floor ring, signalling a human invasion of nature. Various projections force you to bow as you walk through the building, symbolizing your reverence toward nature. The bear, looking like a Byzantine icon set off by a gilded surround, symbolizes the all-powerful forces of nature. The structure faces west, so that in the late afternoon, the bear's shadow is cast upon a screen. This ghostly shadow symbolizes the fragility of nature. McDiarmid teaches sculpture at Franklin and Marshall College.

John Diamond-Nigh (2 sculptures), Patmos Tree: This piece, made mainly of wood, contrasts the smooth geometry of boat-like curves and planes to the unhidden materials of their construction (luscious, dripping glue and glittering screws). Walking around the sculpture allows one to see a thrilling sequence of curves and negative spaces (the "boat" and its interior). The raw, unpainted wood reflects the artist's love affair with natural wood and with the craft tradition from which his sculpture evolved. Requiem: Steel Books: This monumental slab of steel, somewhat threatening with its jagged, metallic teeth encircling it like a necklace, takes



its cue from the Minimalist school of the sixties and seventies. The largely unrelieved expanse of planar metal throws one back on one's own resources, forcing one to interpret the work from private associations and feelings (this is intentional). Diamond-Nigh, a summa cum laude graduate of Penn State Harrisburg, has taught sculpture at Messiah college.

Michael Pascucci, Self Image II: Here we see an elegant revival of the Cubist idiom in a monumental bronze piece with a rich, dark brown patina. Notice the double circle carved out in negative space near the top, a form that suggests the head of a standing figure. The elegant form below, now curved, now angular, jutting out left and right, suggest a figure activating the space before it, while the pole-like form behind suggests stasis and stability. Pascucci, a free-lance bronze sculptor, teaches at the Bucks County Community College.

Jeremy Jernegan, Stanchion II: This sculpture looks like wood, but has a marvelous, lustrous depth of color, like porcelian. Actually, it is ceramic, assembled from slip-cast wooden forms (the work is therefore a technical tour-de-force). This sculpture, with its imposing grid-like structure, suggests humankind's efforts to create enduring, monumental structures. But the ceramic material suggests the underlying fragility of man-made forms, hence the pretension of our species and the ultimate futility of our efforts to conquer nature. Jeremy Jernegan teaches sculpture at Dickinson College.

Peter Jon Snyder, Rano Raraku: Snyder's large, squarish steel work is unexpectedly painted in delightfully gaudy colors. It seems like a painting as much as a sculpture. The yellow and purple paint are meant to contrast deliciously with its green grass surround. The piece is really quite spatial: curving forms jut forward and backward from the principle plane. It is also playful. Do you see the entire piece as the huge head of a friendly monster, with an enormous jaw and eye? Peter Snyder teaches at the Penn State Berks Campus and organizes

a major yearly outdoor sculpture exhibit.

Sculptures in front of the Olmsted Building:

Alan Paulson, Oswego Run: This grand, elegant piece consists of a series of graceful steel archs that rise slowly and rhythmically toward the center, then slowly descend in the same rippling pattern as they return to the earth. The brash, bright red surface reflects the blue sky on top, and serves as a brilliant counterpoint to the color of the grass that surrounds the work. A close examination of the structure reveals great ingenuity and subtlety of design. Paulson, chairman of the Sculpture Department at Gettysburg College, boasts an extensive exhibition record.

Linda Cunningham, Like Time, Like Light, Yet in a Grave Hour: The five sand-cast bronze forms seem to grow like weathered tree trunks from the ridge of ground on which they sit. The trees have long since died, but their life-force still seems to reach up into the sky. The title, from a contemporary poem, is intended to refer to the present "grave hour" in which humankind threatens the environment. A sculptor with an international reputation, Cunningham exhibits regularly in several New York galleries and heads the Sculpture Department at Franklin and Marshall College.

Herbert Simon (two sculptures), Circle In/Circle Out and Negotiating Curves (exhibited side-by-side): Circle In/Circle Out is a huge, horizontal doughnut of steel with short cylinders attached that either project inward, echoing each other, or project outward, opposing each other. Negotiating Curves rises dramatically in a scorpion-like arch that wonderfully compliments its lower companion to the left. Simon's works hark back to the traditions of Constructivism (which emphasizes materials and structure) and to Minimalism (which stresses simplicity and clarity of form.) Simon is Professor of Sculpture at Wilkes University.

Shane's

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