

6 Cool Sculptors At the Ben Shahn

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

WAYNE
"A RATIONAL IMPERATIVE," an exhibition in the Ben Shahn Gallery at William Paterson College, features the works of six sculptors.

The pieces have an obvious basis in geometry, but also show the busyness and diversity of the world existing outside the logical mind.

They are related to Minimalism, but are not pared-down geometry for its own sake. They are less serene than the products of Minimalism and aspire to feistiness and animation.

Elegant curves play off the straight lines, but there is not a wayward line to be seen here. The exhibition, which continues through Thursday, has an air of cool nobility.

The sculpture by Budd Hopkins almost literally addresses this notion of sublime grandeur.

Mr. Hopkins has on display two pieces that are meant to relate as a kind of tableau. One is a temple dedicated to Apollo and alluding to post and lintel construction. But what attracts is its color scheme of white and bright yellow.

The latter is so bright, in fact, that it reflects on the wall behind the piece, and one is reminded of intense Mediterranean light.

In front of the open-work construction is a trapezoidal block that eerily resembles a sacrificial altar. The Apollo of Mr. Hopkins's sculpture governs rationality, but his other work — the guardian figure on the

wall next to the temple — is the most expressionistic piece in the show.

It is an elaborate orange disk with fragmented sections aligned vertically and comprising a kind of body. But this is not a human figure; it is a shamanlike spirit.

The notion of post and lintel also rules two of Nancy Haynes's pieces. The two works, one of white-painted

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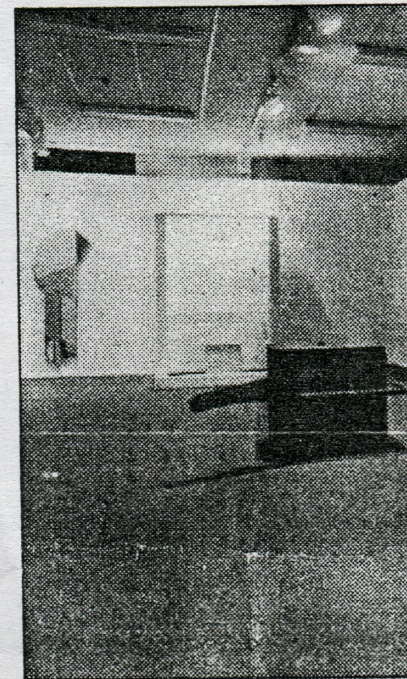
wood and the other of black, make an arresting pair; they seem powerful, essential complements, such as yin and yang.

But these pieces also have a prosaic aspect to them. They look like rustic, though exceedingly well-crafted, doors.

This allusion does not make the pieces more mundane; rather, it is a relevant avenue of approach to their sublime aspects. The word "sublime" comes from the Latin "sublimis," which means up to the lintel, so this reference to doors is weightier than one might have originally supposed.

Caspar Henselmann, the organizer of the exhibition, is also one of its participants. For starters, he has a table-sized steel piece featuring circles and slanting straight elements crisply alluding to the "New Jersey Turnpike," its title.

Another of Mr. Henselmann's works — this one is named for the Holland Tunnel — takes more imagination to appreciate and is more rewarding.

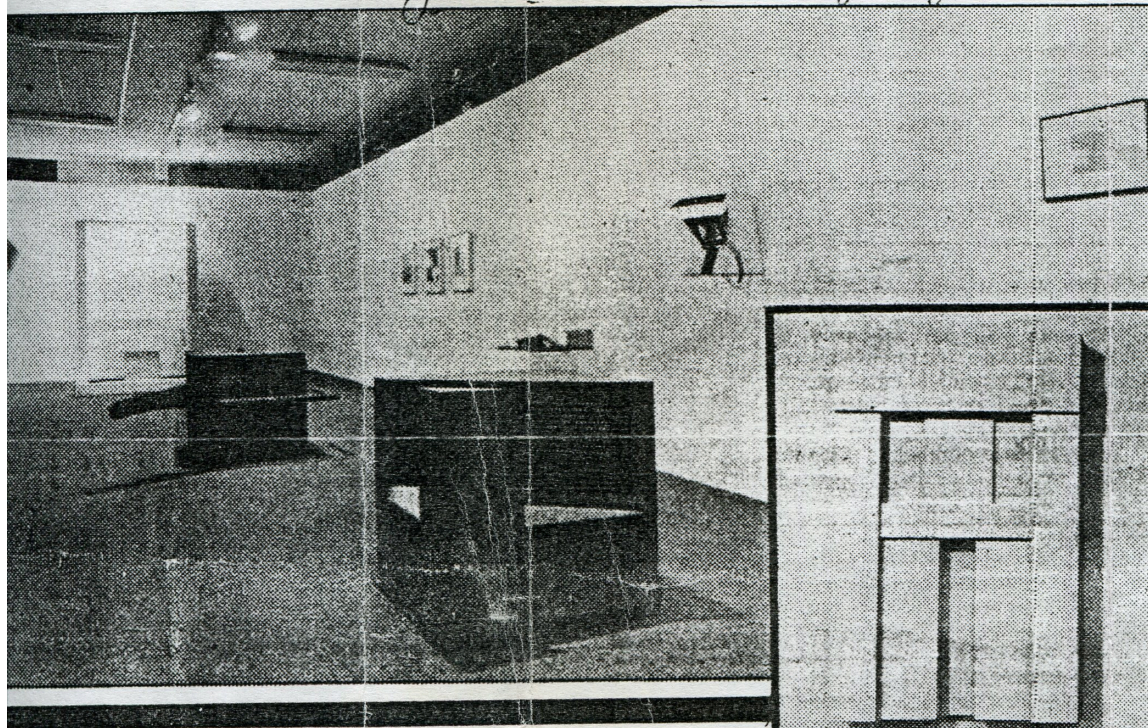


The piece is a large, rusted steel cube cut through, revealing a cross section that resembles a radiator grating. The industrial Northeast has been called the Rust Belt, and Mr. Henselmann's sculpture celebrates that and the industrial vigor responsible for that epithet.

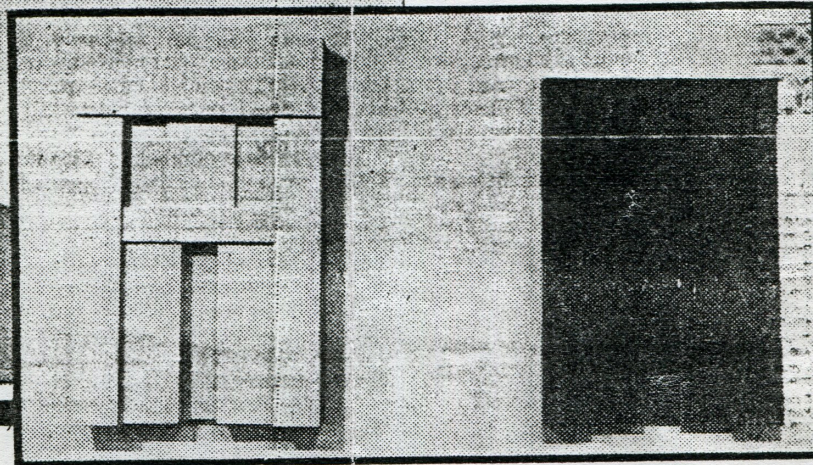
As a whole, the exhibition is a fine visual display, what with hefty works on the floor or pedestals and watercolors and some relief works on the walls. These relate to or take off from the floor sculpture.

Jackie Ferrara's drawing for her pine sculpture "Recall" reveals the details of how the piece was constructed. However, the actual sculpture was damaged on its way to the gallery.

New York Times, Sunday, April 24, 1985



Part of the "A Rational Imperative" show at the Ben Shahn Gallery and, below, two works by Nancy Haynes.



The New York Times / Jack Manning

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For example, Frankie Ferrara's drawing for her sculpture "Recall" reveals the details of how the piece was constructed. However, the actual sculpture was damaged on its way to the gallery.

No wayward lines are to be seen here

This is unfortunate, for its chimney top would have been an impressive addition to the exhibition.

With titles such as "Three Beat Flam" and "Gypsum Flamdiddle," one wonders what the rational imperative might mean for Tim Spelios.

In the show's serious-minded company, Mr. Spelios's works are the loosest, but they are still clear expositions

of curves, circles and straight-line sections. What makes these pieces cunning is their size; they are like small footstools.

Mr. Spelios also has graphite drawings on display and one photo-collage on paper. The latter is jam-packed with varied visual images about the size of postage stamps. It is a piling on of worldly experiences, the antithesis of the rest of the exhibition.

Ulrich Niemeyer is represented by six wall reliefs that he calls "Houses." They are simply arrangements of various plywood sections, but they are painted with such lustrousness that the wood resembles bronze, either with or without a patina.

Mr. Niemeyer also has a knack for making cement, when painted, look like bronze. Another sculpture that is actually bronze looks pale against the faux bronze pieces.

The kinds of works displayed in "The Rational Imperative" aim at timelessness, and one can see the contribution of Cubism and Constructivism, as well as Minimalism.

These artists are convinced that they are on the main line of art's evolution in the 20th century. The tangled picture that the art world as a whole presents does not clearly bear out this view, but this exhibition is a clear picture of its persistence. ■