

ART

Group Show With 'Side Dish'

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

THE group show now at Rutgers's Robeson Center Gallery, in Newark, follows precedent in having a solo as a "side dish." And, as usual, Alison Weld is responsible for both events. The difference is that Ms. Weld, having left Rutgers for the State Museum in Trenton, is guest instead of resident curator.

All four members of the group live up to the show's title, "The Life Force," but the sculptors, Isaac Witkin, Ursula von Rydingsvard and Claire Lieberman, do so more dramatically than Susan Laufer, who is represented only by drawings. Mr. Witkin's bronze stands around 8 feet tall, a cluster of four elongated shards and scroll forms leaning against one another with shapes like large lily pads gathered around the base.

This is a patently earthbound image, unlike its equally tall companion cast in aluminum, which resembles a tree except that its lobes and flanges float as if underwater. Enhancing this Art Nouveau quality is the surface of the work, which is pitted and white in the middle of planes, smooth and dark gray at the edges and on extremities.

Though it all but covers one of the gallery's walls, Ms. von Rydingsvard's "Zakopane" has the presence of an ancient boat, something run up by the Vikings, perhaps — or a structure built by Melanesians. The main component is a screen of vertical planks beveled to look like box pleats

and daubed with gray paint. Attached to the top in a line are clusters of short beams pointing diagonally upward, and for each of these truncated trusses there is, at the bottom of the screen, a deep pocket that seems to have been hacked out of a single block. A work of art brut, it steals the show.

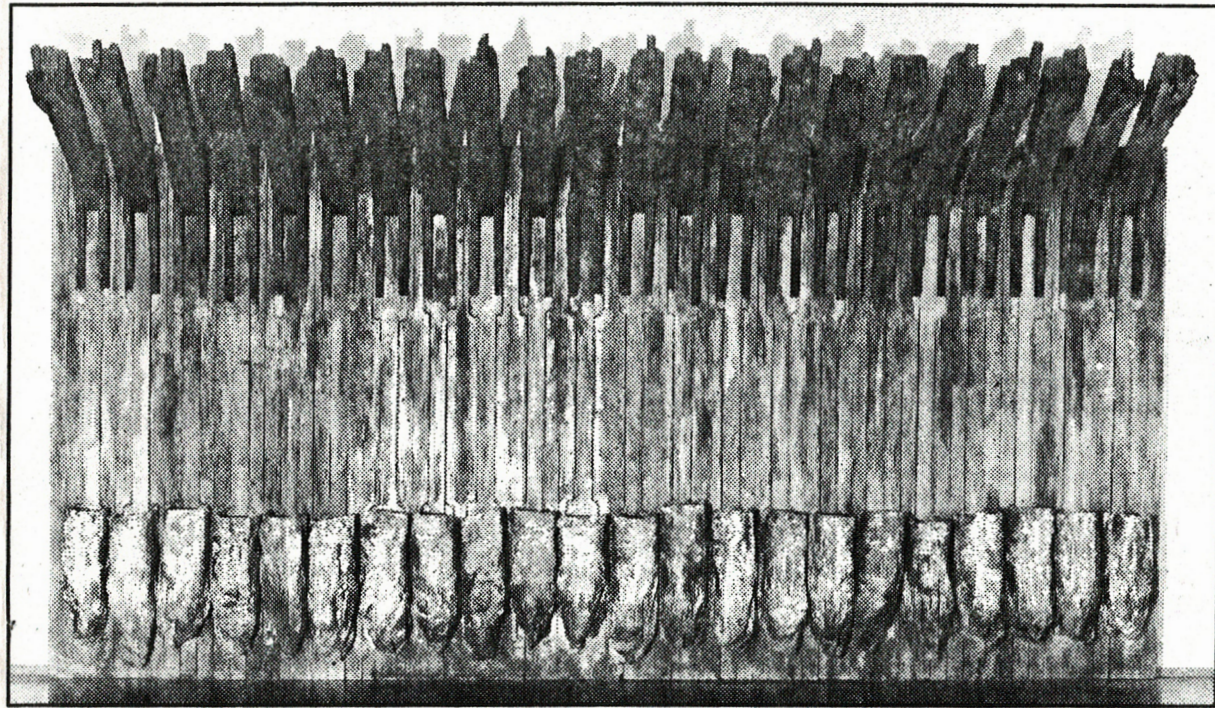
Even so, Claire Lieberman's black marble carvings are worth a look, especially for their skins, which are striped with broad chisel marks. These are so pale as to seem enhanced by whitish paint. As to the carvings themselves, one is a horizontal mass suggesting giant fingers bunched together; the other is a "log" bisected vertically and mounted at an angle on a base like a stepladder. They are impressive, but would be less so without their decorative surfaces.

Some of Susan Laufer's images aspire to the biological fantasies of Terry Winters, others to Turner's late seascapes. Either way, these monochromes punctuated by patches of bright color are at the wrong party — not that they would fare any better juxtaposed with Nancy Cohen's sculptures next door.

Ms. Cohen finds her materials — bits of plastic and metal, nails, a toy hand grenade, razor blades and the like — blends them into obelisk-like shapes and disguises them with paint, candle wax, bits of fur and so on. Hers is a visceral Surrealism not unlike that of the young David Hare. A statement accompanying the show speaks of conflict in the assemblages — between violence and delicacy, strength

and fragility. But to the reviewer, the conflict is between the indolence of Surrealism and a sense of purpose, something that is clearly reflected by "Confluence." The largest and latest of the pieces, it is a blackened convex pear form on one side and a concavity filled with short wood spikes on the other.

Both shows run through Nov. 30. The gallery, at 350 Martin Luther King Boulevard in Newark, is open from 11:30 A.M. to 5 P.M. Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 11:30 A.M. to 6 P.M. Tuesday and Thursday.



"Zakopane," a 1987 work in cedar and paint by Ursula von Rydingsvard.