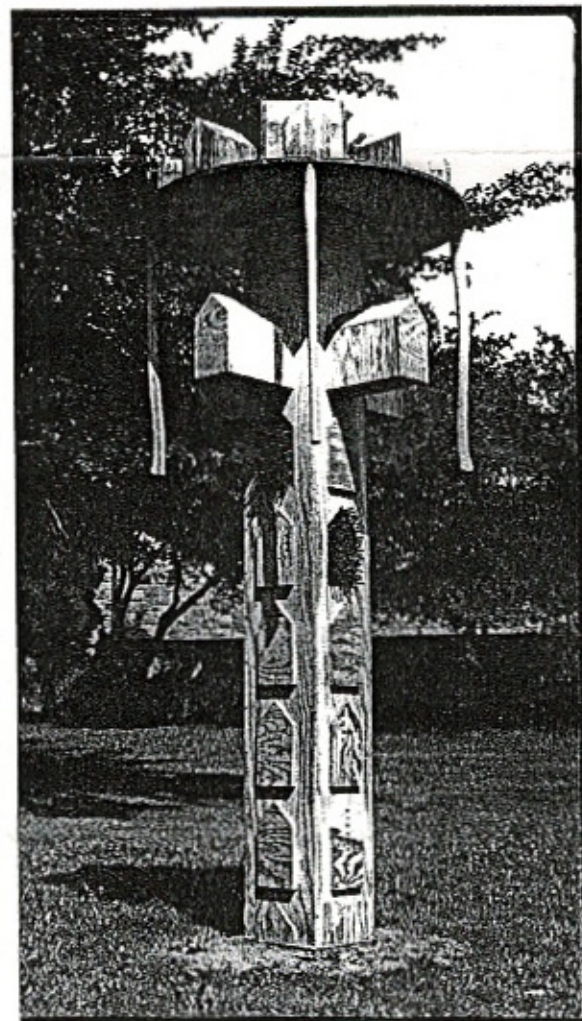


The Great Outdoors



Above, Nancy Cohen: *A Community of Shelter* (detail, 1992); below, Colin Chase: *The House of Many Stories: Prayer Wheel*



By Arlene Raven

Walden is melting apart.
—Henry David Thoreau

July 11. The fog had lifted from the southern tip of Northern California's Napa Valley at San Pablo Bay. Facing their chosen congregation under a burning sun, Laura and Dan married one another in a ritual of their own design. Meanwhile I, fanning myself furiously from the sticky confines of a highly reflective plastic chair, alternately wept and sneezed.

Neither nature nor culture are what they used to be. Carbon dioxide rises, ozone falls. Communism falls apart, Europe comes together. But not in that order. Not, in fact, in any recognizable order at all. The framing of rituals and objects in this depleted yet still open air can tell of more than their own construction. Such works may also reveal the character of a chaotic yet static current of antipathy beyond.

June 25. Maren Hassinger's *Circle of Bushes*, recently installed on the grounds of the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University in Brookville as part of the Hillwood Art Museum's public art program, transposes art and nature directly. "Trees" made of metal, "planted" among the maples and elms, seem to be in the same formal family.

The philosophical juncture of art and nature as a synthesis or a common confusion arises most clearly when the handcrafted bushes catch falling organic leaves. These leaves become part of the sculptures just as the sculp-

tures have become part of the landscape. A viewer naturally associates and even merges the two kinds of trees in her mind. What, then, is the feature within the object or action that distinguishes art from nature and nature from culture?

Moving even closer toward a synthesis of historically opposing categories, Noah Jemison makes the process of growth and change the focus of a birch-wood house frame nearby. Jemison offers his delineation of home as a symbolic community dwelling and an actual arbor of vertical vines for morning glories and sweet peas to climb toward the sun.

July 6. Ursula von Rydingsvard's first full-scale museum survey at Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, accompanied by Michael Brenson's stirring written commentary, moves from indoors (beginning with works executed as early as 15 years ago) to outdoors, where von Rydingsvard's most recent stacked, laminated, and carved cedar sculptures have been made especially for—and comfortably occupy—the park's majestic green expanse.

There is a particular advantage in seeing these inspired monumental sculptures, from which a sweet sap smell emanates, in Storm King's white-walled galleries as well as on its mowed knolls. From a second-story window, the view of a single tree against the clipped grass and the similarly hacked and scooped top of von Rydingsvard's *Five Cones* raises a question about the relativity of the natural condition of human-made, found, and "natural" or di-

vinely created phenomena.

Because looking at anything these days is also looking through the disturbing lens of the approaching millennium, the real relevance of such contrasts, comparisons, and constructs withers away. New art/society paradigms will seem self-evident when indigent to a future instant, but they have not yet surfaced.

The intersecting steel ventilation pipes of Nancy Holt's *Ventilation IV: Hampton Air* extends from the gallery at East Hampton's Guild Hall to the adjacent garden. A large, floor-to-ceiling pipe in the center of the gallery is the centerpiece for a blossoming plethora of smaller like members. One of these elements appears to penetrate the wall and continue into the courtyard. But this is an artistic illusion.

July 8. Manhattan (melting apace in a way Thoreau never dreamed) contains public art of every description. But in this summer season outdoors, more artists attempt to communicate a sense of significance to their self-selected communities comparable to that of the ritual and monument of marriage I will witness.

A homeless soul lies at the heart of collective urban humankind: so much so that those finding shelter at Madison Square Garden and the Port Authority had to be banished from the sight of the Democratic convention in order to erase the social realism of the city. Downtown in Thomas Paine Park, near the Civic Center, Nancy Cohen's *A Community of Shelter* (a splendid site installation of six sculptures low to the ground, tied to trees with rope) makes references to local citizenry and sanctuary. Large-scale elements, including shells, pods, and a nest, most covered with adobe, allude to natural forms.

Cohen appreciates the urban shelters at the periphery of the park invented by New York City homeless as a necessity for survival within the resources of their physical environment. A corrugated cardboard rectangle that somebody calls home rests a few yards from Cohen's almost identical silhouette—a steel box of welded metal filled with industrial cast-offs such as plastic tubes, electronic cables, and computer boards. Through intentional imitation, she pays homage to the ingenuity and economy of homeless builders.

The relationships between art and morality, like those between idealism and consensus, are at their most intense when applied to works of contemporary public art. Yet these philosophical and ethical relationships are also at their most tenuous in the situation of art that has been placed in the midst of, created especially for, or made in the name of, a community. This is true because art needs to be both strong and vulnerable. Art in the completely

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public arena, more so than work in museums, is mortal.

July 17. Stepping into soil softened by pouring rain at the Jerome Avenue entrance to the Woodlawn Cemetery, I approach the grassy slope that grounds the eight unorthodox monuments of "Houses of Spirit, Memories of Ancestors." Far from dedication to the anonymous discarded that artists' memorials made for the streets of New York declare, Woodlawn Cemetery lists Miles Davis and Elizabeth Cady Stanton among its celebrity buried.

Artworks among these mausoleums differ markedly from their surrounding shrines. Colin Chase's tall plywood monolith, *The House of Many Stories: Prayer Wheel*, uses the schema of two- and three-dimensional rectangles topped by triangles as its motif and metaphor. Sealed homes the size of bird roosts, resting on a rotating circle above eye level, house thousands of prayer scrolls within. Wishing for world peace and the sun, I spin the wheel clockwise in the age-old ritual to transcend coeval cynicism and release hope. ■

A Summer Art Sampler

● *Menagerie* by Liz Whitney Quisgard, Broadway Windows, sponsored by NYU, Broadway at East 10th Street, through September 7.

● The Lower Manhattan Sign Project, presented by REPOhistory and sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Center as part of "Americas?" a borough-wide exhibition, 432-0900, through December 27.

● *A Community of Shelter* by Nancy Cohen, a sculpture installation at Thomas Paine Park, intersection of Centre, Lafayette, Pearl, and Worth streets, sponsored by the Temporary Public Art Program of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, through November 30.

● *The Wonder Women Wall* by Grace Graupe-Pillard, Port Authority Bus Terminal, North Wing/Main Level, 42nd Street

and Eighth Avenue. Sponsored by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, through July 31.

● "Art in the Anchorage," six installations by Helene Aylon, Gretchen Bender, Mildred Howard, Seiko Mikami, Liz Young, and the Women's Action Coalition in the vaults of the Brooklyn Bridge. Presented by Creative Time, 206-6674, through September 20.

● *Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap* by Glenn Ligon, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, 120 Park Avenue, 878-2453, through November 28.

● *Modern Head* by Roy Lichtenstein, a stainless-steel sculpture at South End Avenue and Liberty Street, Battery Park City, sponsored by the Public Art Fund, through the end of the summer.

● *Bill of Rights* by William Fulbrecht, concrete markers with inscriptions from the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, at Flatbush Avenue and Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn, also sponsored by Public Art Fund, through April 1993.

● "Six Sculptors," works by Robert Chambers, Andrew Dunnill, Robin Hill, Katarina Isaksson, Henry Klimowicz, Jann Rosen-Queralt, and Simon Lee at the Long Island University/Brooklyn Campus, University Plaza, 718-488-1051, through October.

● "Houses of Spirit, Memories of Ancestors," works by Colin Chase, Kathleen McCarthy, Nick Mieros, Laura Fields and John Sprague, Tom Finkelparl, Dina Bursztyn, and Renee Stout, at Woodlawn Cemetery, Jerome and Bainbridge Avenues, the Bronx. Sponsored by

the Bronx Council on the Arts, 920-0500, through November 1.

● Public Art Program, Hillwood Art Museum, C.W. Post campus, Long Island University, Brookville, 516-299-2788. New additions.

● *Ventilation IV: Hampton Air* by Nancy Holt, at Guild Hall, 158 Main Street, East Hampton. Part of "Volume 6 Contemporary Sculptors" (Alice Aycock, Lynda Benglis, Maren Hassinger, Mel Kendrick, John Newman), 516-324-0806, through August 2.

● Ursula von Rydingsvard, Storm King Art Center, Old Pleasant Hill Road, Mountainville, 914-534-3115, through October 31.

● Inaugural Exhibition (15 artists) at Grounds for Sculpture, 18 Fairgrounds Road, Mercerville, New Jersey, 609-890-7777, through August 31.

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