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Michigan Fine Arts '88

Juror talks about the process of selection

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN SCULPTOR Alice Aycock has a vision that stretches far beyond the confines of the average non-artist's mind.

As juror for the Michigan Fine Arts Competition at Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, Saturday, April 9, through Saturday, May 14, she chose works that suggested or incorporated that same long sweep. It is completely different from the competitions of other years. For while exhibitions of past years reflected the personalities of the judges to a substantial degree, none have done so more than this one.

Aycock comes out of a tradition of artists who work in, around, through and beyond images. Her take-off point for the group of outdoor wooden constructions that she created for Cranbrook in the mid '70s was the St. Bartholomew's Fair in 1133. Other sculptures and drawings have a relationship to farm machinery, kitchen equipment, war machines, architectural and battlegrounds. She draws from history, then filters and refines the reference, until it takes on an independent spirit that makes it a work of art with historical symbology with a ghostly image of once-upon-a-time function.

It is her own ability to push an idea beyond normal expectations, to move courageously along the narrow edge of the precipice that is mirrored in the show.

DURING A WORKSHOP at the Art Association, she led participants through the exhibition and explained why she chose each piece.

"My concerns were first of all, in the run-through, that the work holds up. I went back three or four times. I probably respond to work that has some level of content."

She gave a brief history of art citing artists such as Cezanne, Picasso and Pollock who "give one the sense of how the artist viewed the world," as examples. Then it ceased, "hard edge" became an intellectual exercise that had to be explained to be understood.

"The reintroduction of content was a marvelous thing. . . . When image came back, it was a very exciting time for painting. In the '50s and '60s, all you had to know was how to put the tape on right. It was dry and boring."

The large painting, "Mozart" (\$100 award) by Allegory (a.k.a. Nancy Nash) illustrated the inter-



The painting by Jan Michael Field of Belleville, "Jungle Jim's," won the \$1,000 first prize.

est that the use of image creates. As she stood before the \$1,000 first-prize painting, "Jungle Jim's" by Jan Michael Field, she said, "There's a story going on. . . I like to look at that painting."

She said she had considered giving the first prize to a ceramic sculpture, "Rabbit Head" by Deborah McLennan (\$750 second prize), but she was afraid people would assume "she only gives prizes to sculpture."

Of the rabbit she said, "It has a kind of iconic quality. It's very obdurate. It has a sacred stone quality."

Saying it has a little of the quality of the large sculpted heads (found in the wilds of Central America and Mexico), she added, "I really like the transformation of the material, you don't know it's clay."

THE EXHIBITION, in Aycock's mind, has a progression that begins with mark making and moves on to more personal handwriting, symbols and images. She commended Piper Shepard (a large three-dimensional multimedia work), Carolyn Smith Armatage (painting),

James Fagan (two acrylics) and Benita Goldman (painted construction) for taking chances and pushing their work rather than playing it safe.

She liked Rita Dibert's two photographs because they are "about very mundane things. They have a very mundane quality."

She stopped for a long time to enjoy two paintings by Carolyn Zak of Rochester (\$75 award). She said of one of them that, from a distance, looks like a blackboard with white scratches on it. "The scratches become very important. I like her color. I'd love to see this artist take on a larger canvas."

She commented on the pure beauty of the painting by Karen Bodyscombe of Ann Arbor. "I would ask this person to tell us something more we don't know, and take a chance." The unexpected colors used by Valerie Allen Loop in Rummy's painting moved back and forth from symbol, mark and form.

She compared the two wrapped figures in the photographs by David Rayfield of Midland to the French sculptures called "pleureux" or mourners and said it would be interesting to see how much farther it could move.

She liked the way the shapes in Jessica Gondak's two paintings "hold that tension" and the "push-pull tension" in D'Ann deSimone's two paintings (\$75 award).

SHE LABELED both the shaped canvases by Larry Butcher of Midland and the sculpture by Stephen Nesvacki of Traverse City "idiosyncratic" and was sorry in both cases that a second work wasn't available. Butcher had sold his other one and Nesvacki's second had been broken in transit.

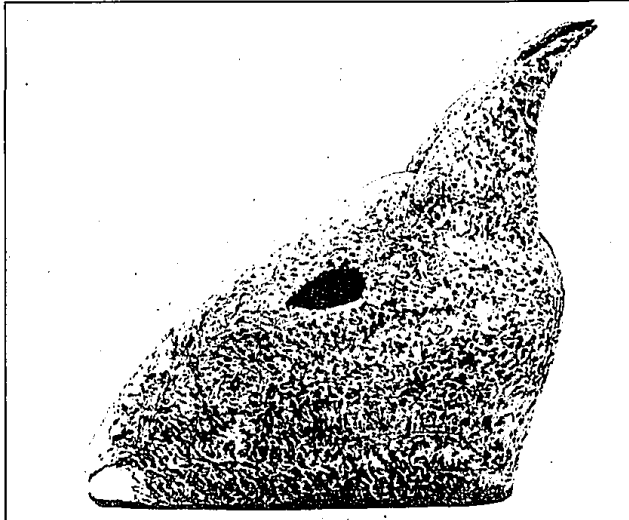
Of one of two "not very pretty" large paintings by Audrey Leaman of Jackson (honorable mention), she said, "I like the way it holds its ground. . . . It's more difficult art, that's what I respond to."

The three-dimensional construction by Robert Park, she said, "works very well with other pieces in the show. I wanted some pieces that talked to each other."

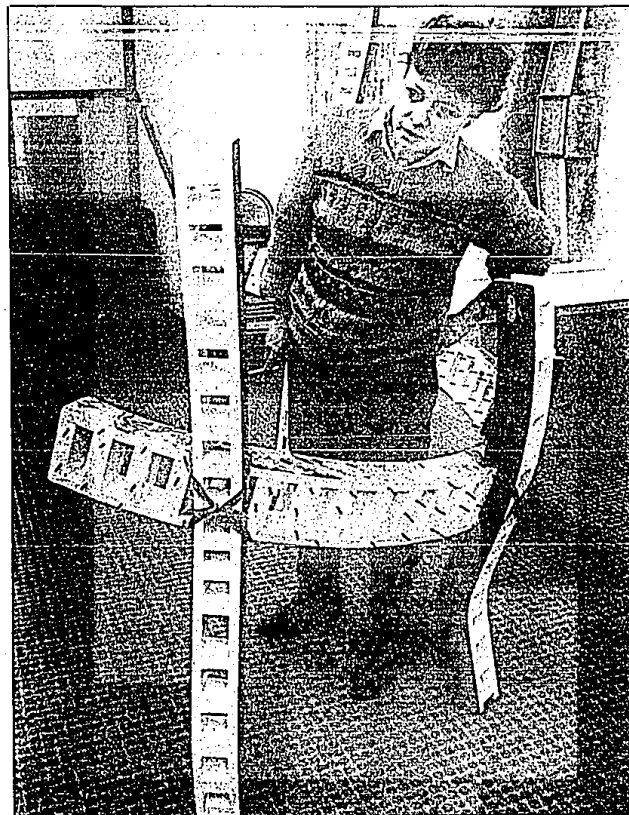
Of the large 16-square watercolor by Yoriko Cronin of Livonia, she said she would like to see the artist work in watercolor or acrylic, but she liked the "mistake-prone spontaneity," adding, "I like to look at it from a distance."

The two sculptures by Dwayne Szot (special category \$500 award), "out of a Duchamp tradition," she compared to poetry and was reminded of the Belgian artist, Panarecco, who makes "machines that fly, but none ever have."

Staff photos by Jerry
Zolinsky



The large, mysterious, ceramic rabbit head by Deborah McLennan of Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, won second prize.



Juror Alice Aycock said the sculpture by Stephen Nesvacki of Traverse City looked as rawhide to secure the joints. He is a furniture maker as well as sculptor.

While touching the marks along the side of a small steel sculpture by Jim Melberg of Birmingham, she said, "This represents a certain point of view."

Looking at the red fish sticking out of a box on wheels by Wesley Curtis of Cranbrook she said, with a hint of a smile, "I'm not sure what it's about. . . . I'm responding

to the visualness of it — the zany-ness."

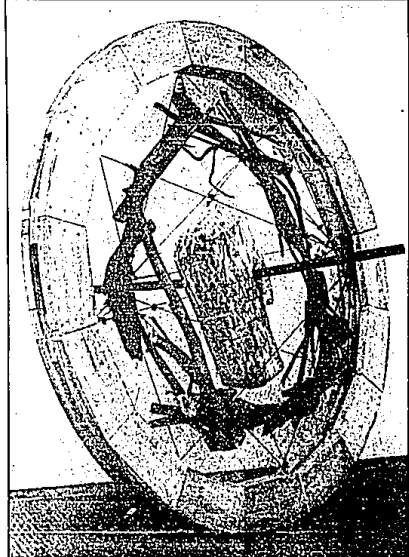
She seemed most comfortable beside Pieter Favier's "Center — Self Center" (\$500 third prize), a large wheel sculpture. . . . It slices the space in an aggressive way — the introduction of the figure, I liked that a lot."

As she completed the tour, she added almost as apology, "I did

pare things down to what I wanted to see in this room."

When questioned about titles, she said, "Titles are very important — in Duchamp's work almost 50 percent. They can help the viewer."

Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, 1516 S. Cranbrook at 14 Mile, Birmingham, is open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



"Center — Self Center" is the title of this large wood-and-metal sculpture by Pieter Favier of Hamtramck. It won third prize.