

turning pages and entering private worlds—variations and fugues too special to be set upon a canvas and too intimate to be displayed in a public space.

Although all three artists employ surreal and nostalgic elements in their works (old mementos and materials, assemblage techniques, bizarre imagery), Lezley is the most literary of the three. She uses the book traditionally—as a *book*—and she alone appears to maintain a commitment to the identity that differentiates a book from a sculpture or other object.

Lezley lovingly chose old twenties, thirties, and forties books and altered them: *College Accounting*, *Nancy Drew*, *Creative Thinkers*. She literally scooped out the text and in its place inserted her own materials. Along with her drawings, the memory of the old book remains. Her poems separate her from the others. She wrote, "No sooner did he lean against a thick old tree, when his derby became fleshlike with prickly hairs, and his shoes (which he'd removed) grew tongues where the insoles had once been."

Other works juxtaposed rare, in-

1982, she relaxed and became whimsical. Postage stamps were playfully set in a mystical landscape; each page recycled dreams and embodied the mysticism we've come to look for in her works.

Alison, who has been showing paintings and sculpture, is the most tactile of the three. She produces sculpture and painting in book form—hers is definitely a novel approach. Begging to be touched and handled, they are at once pop-up gone one step further, becoming archaeological tablets, frescoes, and highly sophisticated pat-the-bunny books for grown-ups.

The archaeological and ritualistic aspect of her work inspires awe. Tin, tar paper, pottery shards, and other urban discards have been recycled into new/old objects that nearly defy description. While some, such as *Dreaming of Mailmen*, *Old Beaus*, and *Big Lesson* refer to waiting for letters from boyfriends, faded romances, and unrequited love, others are positively savage. Alison continues to use the coyote and dog (shades of Paul Gauguin) as metaphor. In *Big Bad Book*, she allows dogs to perform all sorts of socially objectionable

Orange Door Gallery as the nucleus of an organic work that drew the streetscape in, stretched the figure out, and generally contorted the armchair definitions of "inside" and "outside." "I was combining a lot of ideas in one shot," admits Seamster. Without question, some of the work's difficulty arose from the fact that this installation included so many composite parts.

Entering the gallery, we passed a stairway that offered a vantage for viewing the installation. Within the space, an abstracted roadway was rendered on the floor with sharp paint. Fragments of angular vectors hung from the ceiling on acrylic panels. At the northeast corner a splayed latex figure was suspended by her feet, gazing outward, while facing the room's southern wall a smoothly finished plaster cast of the artist knelt upon a pedestal, apparently in bondage.

A sound track of meditative breathing expanded and contracted the room.

We were confronted with a mass of visual information, and at first it read like garbled telemetry. But as we mounted the stairs, a gestalt began to form. The streetwise ele-

the same time, the bound figure seemed to be the only secure one.

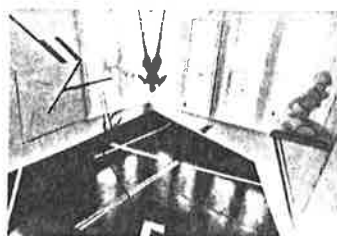
I felt that a crystalline statement hung in the air, just out of reach, and out of reach it would have remained, had the artist not participated on opening night. For the length of the crowded evening, Seamster herself knelt naked on the pedestal, in the stock-still pose of the bound figure. With that single cohesive element joining the installation's disparate themes—feminism, consumerism, inside/outside—meaning snapped into place. Each viewer was shocked into direct personal contact with the artist as object. Warm and vulnerable within the installation's otherwise cold inventory, Seamster's silent presence provided the keystone for the work's elusive and deeply introspective power. Entering the room was enough to make one's hackles rise—like listening to a secret from someone whose lips brush your ear.

Seamster "performed" only for the opening. Too bad. Lacking her physical electricity, the installation struggled in vain to articulate itself. The artist's plaster understudy just didn't have the requisite charisma and the warm-blooded snap needed to activate the space. It's as though the continuance of the show served merely to document the initial event; the spell was gone and only the props remained. Although they came terribly close to succeeding on their own, it took the genuine flesh of the artist to pull this one together.

—Jeff Greenwald



Betye Saar (right), *Timely Interest*. Collage book, 5 x 3". Lezley Saar (center), *Handbook of Best Reading*. Altered Book, 8 1/4 x 5 1/4 x 1 1/2". Alison Saar (left), *Sweet Meat*. Mixed media book, 6 x 6 1/4 x 1 1/4".



Mary Seamster, Installation, 1982. Photo J. R. Babbe.

sightful humor against this surreal image from *In Defense of Women*. In a small, bound illustrated book titled *My Friend's Faults* she states, "She wears sweaters that yank out her hair"; on another page: "He's lazy and his teeth are too thick."

Betye Saar, the veteran of the group, incorporates touch, smell, taste, sound, and sight in her books. Still concerned with metaphysical and spiritual qualities embodied in nature, she combines relics with new materials, producing delicate collages and imbuing them with a power much stronger than their simple materials would suggest. In approximately a dozen small collage notebooks made in

acts (as dogs will) while alluding to a pristine domesticity. This "jackal" and Hyde identity is the very heart of her art, giving it much power.

Looking at the books of these women, I am left wondering as much about the information that they withhold as about what I saw.

—Faith Flam

MARY SEAMSTER at Orange Door Gallery

Santa Barbara

Figure and ground have never been more ambiguous than in Mary Seamster's current installation. The artist, long involved with floating and suspended form, used the

ments shifted into line, and the gallery space expanded to encompass the busy intersection outside, which included buildings and storefronts. On the roof of the paint store across the street, a life-size latex female appeared in a cocoon of concentric rings, stretched into a position that suggested both anger and exaltation. Down the block, in the display window of a clothing store, a third rubber personage beckoned from a cage.

With the introduction of these dynamic figures, which seemed to work in concert with the inverted figure inside, the bound plaster effigy seemed cut off; it's as if the artist had been forbidden to participate in the cryptic drama; yet at

OSKAR SCHLEMMER'S BAUHAUS DANCES OF THE 1920s

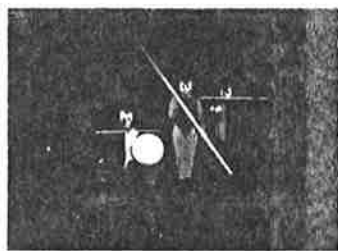
Reconstructed by Debra McCall at the Kitchen

New York

An early manner of presenting conceptual content in art through a visual theater came about with the introduction of performance art by Bauhaus expatriots in the 1930s at Black Mountain College, North Carolina. American artists were given the intellectual tools for physically staging visualizations of time, action, and compositional space through performance. Today's collaborations between visual and performing artists and the need to study historical precedents have rekindled an in-

terest in the work of performance art pioneers, Oskar Schlemmer, in this case. With the help of Andreas Weininger (a former Bauhaus student and Schlemmer performer), Debra McCall, a New York-based choreographer, movement analyst, and dancer, has painstakingly reconstructed several of Schlemmer's "architectonic lecture-dances." McCall chose to study these particular dances—dating from 1926 to 1929—by the Bauhaus painter and sculptor because of their clean and abstract choreographic style structured to illustrate the relationship between the geometry of the human figure and the mathematics of abstract (pictorial) space.

Last fall the Kitchen sponsored performances of Debra McCall's reconstructions of seven of Oskar Schlemmer's dances at the Ethnic Arts Center. These were *Figure in Space*, *Space Dance*, *Form Dance*, *Gesture Dance*, *Hoop Dance*, *Block Play*, and *Pole Dance*. The program was presented on a black scrimmed stage area with a large, bisected rectangle marked out on the floor and overscored by diagonal lines forming an X. For



Oskar Schlemmer, *Form Dance* (reconstructed). Photo Craig Massey.

each dance the performers used these linear dissections of the stage for schematic, stylized movement. The seven works were danced variously by Marcia Blank, Jan Hanvik, and Juliet Neidish, who wore padded body suits that transformed them into overstuffed fencers with head masks and gloves. Completely disguised, the performers each personified a primary color; they moved through the designated space more as standardized abstract forms than as individuals. The color breakup of the costumes also served to visually distort their bodies, helping viewers see the abstract elements.

Form Dance utilized all three dancers (the primary colors plus black and white) as well as vol-

umetric compositional props—poles and spheres. To the accompaniment of percussive sounds the figures moved slowly and linearly in relation to one another around the stage, and as they moved, they stopped to form visual compositions with themselves and the objects.

Schlemmer further examined this idea of the displacement of forms and movement in space with the costumes for his *Triadic Ballet* (seen at UCLA in 1980 during the Berlin exchange). In this work the dancers were physically restricted to certain movements by the sculptural costumes. In spite of the robotlike quality of the body suits (in *Form Dance* and in the *Triadic Ballet*), Schlemmer's geometric choreography exuded a playfully exaggerated marionette quality. McCall studied Schlemmer's notes, now at the Schlemmer Archive in Stuttgart, extensively and was assisted by Weininger. Together they recaptured the appropriate interpretation and ambience of the structured movements.

According to McCall, the aim of Schlemmer's architectonic dances (or lecture-demonstrations) was conceptual integration of abstract and figurative compositional elements accomplished through the use of human forms in relation to abstract space. Contemporary performance artists owe much to the groundwork done by Schlemmer and his peers who legitimized and created a foundation for the development of performance art. The faithful reconstruction of these dances reminds us of their historical importance to abstract painting and performance, and it reveals the common ground shared by these art forms, which often look divergent today.

—Katherine Howe

GLORIA KISCH at Cirrus

Los Angeles

Gloria Kisch's sculpture could never be characterized as diffident, but the *Projections* and *Nonprojections* that make up her first solo show here in a few years reveal a huge leap of bravado when compared with the last exhibition seen locally. In that, the *Chimes* series (1979) was exhibited. "Found" stones were set atop slender rods that rose in groups from bases on the floor. Comparatively somber, they were neutral in coloration, if

not exactly neuter in form. Indeed, they shared characteristics of shape with the new *Projections*, but they didn't communicate sexually, as this work does. Now the shafts of the *Projections* are unmistakably phallic, and Kisch moves from the realm of implication to that of symbol.

In keeping with Kisch's usual reference to sources in primitive or ancient art, the *Projections* call to mind Greek herm pillars and Priapus sculptures, not to mention the ithyphallic condition typical of the latter. Some are laterally poised in profile; others point upward, their bases pivoted like metronome pendulums: I could imagine them kicking.

The flat-on-the-wall *Nonprojections*, by contrast, are considerably less pronounced in their reference to sexual anatomy, in this case, female. This places Kisch among artists involved in something of an art-historical turnabout. Indeed, she admits a concern for "balance between maleness and femaleness," and certainly does a heroic job of setting the scales right! (One is reminded of Linda Nochlin's answer to Meyer Schapiro's



Gloria Kisch, *Projections/Non-Projections*, 1981. Mixed media, courtesy Cirrus. Photo Douglas M. Parker.

famous essay "The Apples of Cezanne" in her discussion of "The Bananas of Courbet," in a hilarious paper given at a College Art Association meeting about a decade ago.)

Kisch now lives and works in New York, but these "anthropomorphic icons," as she calls them, are reminiscent of similarly small-scale, vertically-oriented wall sculptures made here in the mid-1970s. Now she has expanded her vocabulary of shapes and textures, but most important, she has added unremittingly flashy color. Fully intense, splashed, spotted, swabbed, or blobbed, it strengthens these works. Projected or non, they vibrate with energy that delights the eye.

Despite deliberateness, Kisch's art seems to be the spontaneous response to an earnest intuition, where reasoned thought does not intrude on the unconscious. (She admits to Jungian concerns.) If all are not equally engaging, many—#12, #42, and #22—are worth special note.

—Merle Schipper

WALTER GABRIELSON at Karl Bornstein

Los Angeles

In recent years, Walter Gabrielson, long a Southern California art-world wit, has renounced humor as a useful medium for conveying artistic content because humor often overwhelms and obscures the idea it is meant to communicate. He has given up eliciting guffaws and painting jokes. In his new paintings, he concentrates on putting shape and color in the service of inquiry that examines the human condition, and he eliminates anything that might get in the way.

Generalized figures float in vast open spaces, and their counterparts in sculptures, painted wood-carvings, sit on little platforms. These broadly brushed, thinly painted people—flat in the paintings and rounded, somewhat geometric in the carvings—are soft of edge and hue and anatomically simple. One sees just enough specificity to indicate attitude and gesture, sometimes gender. Additional clues are offered only when essential to support a narrative. In *Flying Home*, figures propelling themselves through the sky are seen in business dress, but in *Risk*, the near-specter of a figure leaping from one tombstonelike shaft to another is almost completely undefined except for profile. In *Fellow Travelers*, no facial features are needed to convey the psychological distance between the nude couple. That they cannot make eye contact is perfectly clear.

Gabrielson's settings are similarly expressive. Palm trees and sunsets might occasionally allude to Hawaii (where the artist has spent some time) and the halcyon life, but in general, they tend to suggest the unbroken expanse of open country and sky that can be seen anywhere in the West. Also, this kind of visual perception could have been prompted by the artist's experience as a pilot, or it could even refer to rural Minnesota, where he grew up. Nevertheless, plenty of urban anx-