

Helwaser Gallery

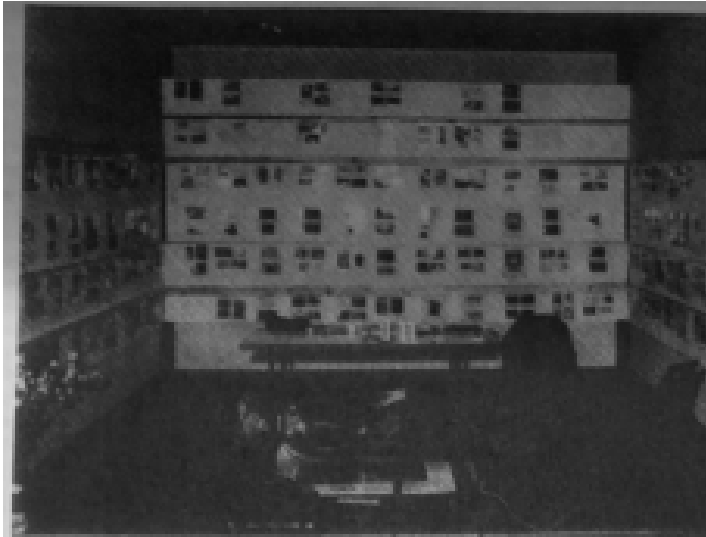
Helwaser Gallery

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Onorato, Ronald J. "Richard Fleischner." Mar. 1979, pp. 68-69.



"Post Card Size Art," 1979, installation at P. S. 1

mercial galleries, with their strict and complex means of selection. More than this, I imagine that many artists make very small-scale works who do not make larger ones—both because large works are expensive and because they require and stand for confidence and ambition. While the general level of the show is thus amateurish, it is at the same time filled with wonderful idiosyncrasies that most galleries would exclude, except if from certain "licensed" eccentrics like Samaras or Jon Borofsky. Both because it is a very intimate medium and because it is by nature almost antipublic (unlikely to be exhibited and actually physically concealable) postcard-size art seems almost naturally to draw out what is most peculiar from individual artists and from the network as a whole.

—LEO RUBINFIEN

Amherst

RICHARD FLEISCHNER, University of Massachusetts

Adjacent to the University of Massachusetts football stadium in Amherst stands an 8-foot-tall chain-link fence encompassing an area some 60 feet square. Containing neither the tennis courts nor the electrical transformers one might expect within such industrial fencing, the metallic webwork is, instead, the perimeter of RICHARD FLEISCHNER's newest sited work, *Chain Link Maze*.

Surely the experience of walking through a convoluted corridor flanked by a mesh fence doesn't sound like anybody's idea of a pleasurable or engaging experience. Over the past few years, however, several artists—Bruce Nauman and Mary Miss come immediately to mind—have used similar materials in smaller works with effects very different from Fleischner's. In fact, he has given us what we least expect, transforming the mesh into a shimmering translucent edge, defining the rectilinear exterior of his work in the otherwise open field site.

The work sits, as do most of Fleischner's projects, delicately on its terrain—it does not so much structure the natural, open site as it asserts itself discreetly, sensitively on the slightly rolling topography as a neat, geometrically concise object. Once through the corner entryway, we are confronted with a long corridor, the beginning of a path that winds, multicursal, toward a central inner chamber. Decisions must be made, and confusion is possible as we look through the wire grid at spaces beyond our reach. Both entry and path are ample, affording no sense of claustrophobia. One is struck instead by the open, hospitable feeling of the first corridors as they trace the perimeter. Comfortable strides are possible within the labyrinth; one can even turn or stop easily. It is not long before one of several decision points is reached—several paths can be taken but no great mistake can be made. It is as if the artist wants to

coax us gently through this experience. There is no threat here but instead a luller, more rewarding task of finding one's own way. We are separated spatially but never visually from the outdoor environment as we can almost always see shimmering details through the various layers of mesh.

As one traverses the walkway, patterns of light reflect off the metallic walls, sometimes creating moon-like surfaces, at others seeming almost flat and mat-colored. Fleischner has given us a visual labyrinth as well as a participatory maze. In no other maze are almost all the parts visible even as we are confined to a specific track. Depending on how many layers of chain link we gaze through (and this can vary from one to almost a dozen), details of the environment and other figures in the maze fade in and out of our sight. This seems then the perfect visual accompaniment to the fugitive spatial experiences we all undergo within a labyrinth.

In *Chain Link Maze*, Fleischner uses intuition to achieve his means—physical, optical and psychological experiences that depend on carefully measured spaces. In a broader context, a work like this directly engages some of the notions, particularly American, of the unbounded, natural environment. Fleischner works directly in the landscape, sometimes using concepts from rarified historical traditions. He has reasserted his ability visually to grasp the given landscape in a particularly American fashion, while simultaneously structuring situations within that landscape derived from conventions of garden design, architectural history and spatial perception.

—RONALD J. ONORATO

Los Angeles

MARIA KARRAS, Woman's Building and RTD; "Two Views of Manzanar," Frederick S. Wight Gallery, U.C.L.A.; MICHAEL TODD, Arco Center; BILLY AL BENGSTON, James Cordonat Gallery; ELEANOR ANTIN, Long Beach Museum of Art;

Although I guiltily tell the latest California joke—you know, the one about how many Californians does it take to change a light bulb (one to do it and four to share the experience)—I am not mero-centric. Mero-centric: overweening pride in the city where you live, characterized by the syllogism, "If X is such a terrific city, and if I live there, then I am terrific by association." It translates into obdurate provincialism when practiced