

Perlberg, Deborah. "Sculpture Sited' Nassau County Museum of Art." Art

sort of structuralist definition, such an analysis has a place only as an authoritative apology for otherwise gratuitous activity. Breaking up is hard to do seems to be saying that if Goffman's analysis of public behavior is important then Beime is important because he makes reference to it.

There is something vaguely insulting in Beime's attitude toward the public. He attempts to define the behavior of oblivious people on the street as indicative of a reality of which they have no notion and which is sensible only to the secret artist in their midst and his voyeur audience.

Strained as the theoretical rationale for these pieces may be, it still provides Beime with an imperative for taping "x" instead of "y," and the process develops certain interesting incidental features. The image of an art audience in the sanctity of a gallery space (or at home) watching via video hook-up an artist-"visionary" struggling to impose order on the wild world is potentially a moving one. And though I don't agree with Beime's theorizing or its place in his work, both tapes were fun to watch.

Despite its overt behavioral roots, *Cross Reference* obliquely acknowledges video's most obvious source: not sociology or psychology, but commercial TV, entering into competition with it by the live broadcast. Bringing video art into the home proposes the reverse—bringing commercial TV into the gallery context. A string of commercials, for instance, would make a forceful video Readymade.

An incident is something out of the ordinary. EDDA RENOUF creates incident in the archetypal ordinariness and regularity of the weave of cotton duck by removing every tenth (or so) wool thread and then stretching and "lacquering" the canvas to give her activity a formal meaning and get it considered as painting.

As a Minimalist strategy her work is flawless. She does almost nothing to the materials, just alters them slightly to call attention to their nature. She enables us to see how the wool will bow out at the ends of her long narrow pieces when the canvas shrinks because of the gray acrylic glaze she applies after stretching. The pictures are as cool and smart as any, but their slightly smug presence as works correctly solved like algebra problems ("a," materials, plus or minus "b," artist's critical acumen; equals "c," art) was slightly irritating. If painting is

mobilize more than the artist's senses of taste and art history. Academic modernism has the look of having been staked out critically even before the first trip to the art store.

Renouf's earlier work shown in Europe was also made by removing threads from stretched canvas. These works seem to be considerably more successful, however. They are squarer pictures with only occasional warp as well as wool threads removed. The lines traced the faint distortions in the warp and wool of the cotton emphasized by the rectangularity of the support. The imperfectly flat plane they describe contrasts with the ideal flatness implied by the support, and the delicacy of Renouf's technique is admirably tuned to the delicate discrepancy between the actual and implied surfaces of her paintings. The newer paintings require her technique merely to decorate the surface and realize objects that are a little too self-consciously elegant.

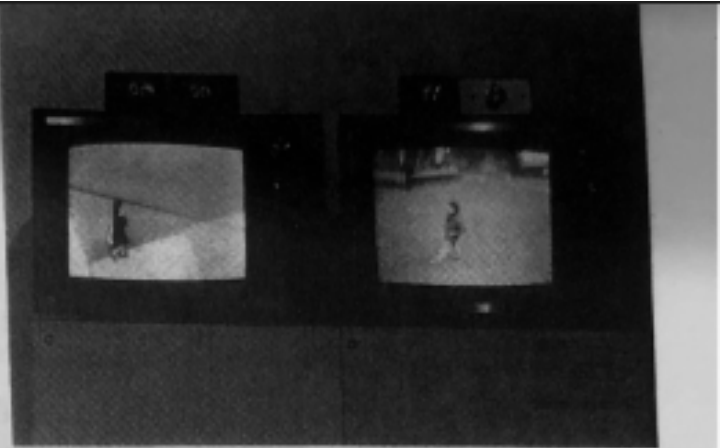
—ROSS SKOGGARD

"Sculpture Sited," Nassau County Museum of Art:

There's a risk involved in labeling a show and then recruiting artists who deal with its supposedly unifying theme. "Sculpture Sited" managed to overcome the artificial limitation of its title as a concern with concept and process dominated its four environmental pieces. Since each invited artist had an individual approach to his site, the work showed surprisingly diverse intentions.

RICHARD FLEISCHNER interpreted the title most literally and in its purest sense—by eliminating built structure entirely, using site itself as the medium. For GEORGE TRAKAS, the built piece is crucial, becoming the vehicle that heightens awareness of a particular environment by manipulating the viewer's relation to an existing site. His elegant bridge structures, implying threat and movement, relied on a deft solution to his chosen problem.

For ALICE AYCOCK, as in past work, the combination of structure and concept are prime factors. The specific setting is less important than the structure imposed on it, which in turn is only a means of creating specific psychological atmospheres. Using primitive site and architecture as reference points in this way removes its specific identity and recycles only its mythical effect. Similarly, the hay pieces previously done by HARRIET FEIGENBAUM cite a specific influence—the Italian hay har-



Ed Beime, *Cross Reference*, 1976. Installation view at the Kitchen showing two installers.

vest process. But where Aycock refines and interprets her source material, Feigenbaum stays so close to her source as only to imitate it. Beyond the obvious implications of the fact that hay rots (nature as a metaphor for life) there is little attempt to apply a greater significance to the work. Ultimately the pieces must rely on the attractiveness of their traditional structures.

Cycles consists of a central cross-shaped line-up of hay-drying racks adorned with bunches of the decaying grass surrounded by haphazard and rotting haystacks. The racks themselves are actually prototypes of their Siennese model. Removed to the lush lawns of Roslyn they seem less Italian than primitive vestiges of a strange rite of crop worship. In this sense they have some presence, due merely to their impressive size and number. Laid out in two intersecting rows, there's a nice perspective created by their long aisles, softened by the fuzzy outline of the attached hay.

The scattered bales placed around the periphery of this grouping are distracting, however. Next to the precision of the central structure, their careful scattering is forced and contrived. Since the piece makes no direct connection between its form and the meaning of the process it illustrates, it loses credibility of concept. Form can relate to concept, as it did in George Trakas's *Transit Junction*.

A low-lying, y-shaped pathway bridging two ponds and ending abruptly in mid-air, *Transit Junction* almost compels you to walk its length, an unsettling experience that fulfills Trakas' intention

of increasing awareness of the viewer's relation to ground, water and woods. Walking each bridge enforces an emotional process of transition; the safety of the path in the woods, then precarious balancing over the pond, and finally the implied danger of hanging in mid-air with nowhere to go but back. Whether or not you literally walk the plank, the implications of this process are clear and forceful, predicting a specific experience and challenging reactions to it.

As a physical piece, *Transit Junction* is graceful in its narrow linearity. Trakas has played some compositional tricks with his materials, making one bridge of metal rods with wooden plank, the other of wood supports and metal plank. Beginning with a single metal pole planted in the earth, then adding uprights, handrail and bridge floor, the piece illustrates its own transition as it changes levels, becoming a useable structure as well as a gesture.

By contrast, the physical form of the gesture in *Cycles* collides with its theatricality. The drying racks set the scene for the playing out of a limited process. It occurs in due time, but only as a good imitation of the real ritual. This dangerous and limiting trap is avoided when Alice Aycock and Richard Fleischner manipulate displaced time and culture in their work. Aycock's *Wooden Posts Surrounded by Five Pits* derives from her interest in primitive rite and myth. Concentric rings of wooden poles planted deep in the earth are encircled by five pits which are lit at night. Hidden in a small clearing, surrounded by thick trees, *Wooden Posts . . .* is basically another piece of built theatrics, em-



Alice Aycock, *Wooden Posts Surrounded by Fire Pits (detail)*, 1976



George Trakas, *Transit Junction (detail)*, 1976, steel and wood

phasizing the eeriness of the ritual grounds waiting for night to fall, the torches to be lit and the unknown ceremony to start. Coming upon it deserted in the daytime creates a powerful feeling of exclusion. What is the ritual, who

is the tribe, is it dangerous or safe to trespass?

This exclusion is carried through by the placement of the central ring of poles. Aycock has planted them closer and closer together, so that it is impos-

sible to walk between them into their center. This protected core becomes a symbolic, sacred space within the sacred space created in the clearing itself. Our constant circling of the poles, peering in but unable to get inside, reinforces the concept of exclusion, the viewer as non-participant. In addition, it adds to the sense of movement otherwise lacking in the piece.

Using these common elements of displaced time and place, Richard Fleischner's cited *Works* use documentation with dramatic effect. Twenty-two wooden stands are placed around the grounds, hidden in small clearings, exposed in open fields or protected under porches. Each stand is a mini-showcase for two photographs; one, a hazy reproduction of the site itself, is juxtaposed with another photo of a sterility somewhere in the world. Fleischner's is the only piece that refers directly to the artist's display inside the gallery, where a map of the world gives the location and description of each of the mystery photos. Next to it, a map of the museum grounds indicates where each is placed on its stand outside. Thus we have a point of reference, relating the origins of each photo and documenting the placement of each set of pictures. On this level the main concern is the substitution/interrelation of real sites.

On another level, the pictorial content of the photos has to be considered. These are often gruesome and disturbing pictures. Random samples include the atom bomb at moment of impact, or an almost formal portrait of a Nazi officer, posed at the edge of a group burial pit, calmly holding a gun to his next victim's head as he smiles at the photographer. These moments of action, stress and destruction sit safely encased in glass next to composed landscape studies. Like before-and-after advertisements they both record and predict never-ending cycles of man's activities. It is a skillful combination, relating the natural environment to man's imposed dis-use of it. Fleischner's documentations define and confine man and nature together, for better or worse.

Because of the complex overlapping of layers of meaning and perception such as Fleischner's and Aycock's, the title of "Sculpture Sited" becomes not limiting, but more an exaggerated understatement—describing pieces that reach way beyond their setting.

—DEBORAH PERLBERG

Harriet Fiegerbaum, *Cycles (detail)*, 1976

