

"HIGH ANXIETY Living Room" is a life-sized exhibit that takes a unique look at the nerve-jangling reality of American domestic life.

American home is focus of Lehman College events

A series of free events is planned at Lehman College to put the spotlight on the changing character of the American home.

On Friday, Sept. 27 at 12:15 p.m. in Carmen B-04 Professor Barbara Kelly of Hofstra University will lecture on "reading the code" of the American home. And on Thursday, Oct. 3 a screening of the movie *Womanhouse* will be shown at 12:15 p.m. The film at Lovinger Theatre is a hourlong documentary about the creation of a feminist art project by Judy Chicago.

Ms. Kelly's talk, illustrated with slides, will examine the shift from function to symbol in architectural design. It focuses on the landscape of the home from the 19th century through the post-World War II build-

ing boom and suburban developments like Levittown.

"Buildings embody a visual code for our values and lifestyles," Ms. Kelly said. "They not only tell as who and what we are, but reinforce those social values among those who use the space."

The events have been scheduled to coincide with *Close to Home*, an exhibition at the Lehman College Art Gallery.

The exhibit is a collection of mixed-media works that explore the familiar images of the home using nontraditional and unexpected materials.

The exhibit runs through Oct. 29 at the gallery. For information, call 960-8732.

ART

Honoring Women as Keepers of the Home

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

CLOSE TO HOME," the current exhibition at the Lehman College Art Gallery, has several facets. It is a show about domesticity and also about the use of familiar, humble materials to create what is sometimes genuine beauty. It also reveals the emergence of a feminist attitude that celebrates women's traditional role as keepers of the home.

The fresh outlook is discussed in an essay in the brochure accompanying the exhibition by Patricia J. Thompson, a Lehman College professor whose speciality is the changing American family. At the heart of her text is Hestia, the goddess whom the ancient Greeks evoked as protector of hearth and home. Ms. Thompson presents the possibility of "re-sacralizing" Hestia, or making her relevant to women's lives "so that we can experience the ordinary transformed into the extraordinary."

Ms. Thompson does not specifically tie work in the exhibition to her thesis, but much of the art illustrates splendidly. Household tasks involve repetition, and many of the pieces in the show are composed of repeated elements. Nene Humphrey's three sculptures all involve a multiple use of a single shape of hammered copper, a spoon with a generous bowl. This motif has both an early American and an African look.

The essence of spoons is emphasized: one work in which spoons are strung on a chain is appropriately called "Lifeline 2." The shape has other associations, as when two curved handles meet to make a kind of manacle.

Coincidentally, Lisa Hoke also calls one of her sculptures "Lifeline." The elements that climb her piece are stiffened colorful shirt sleeves. She has also fashioned a tiny headless figure out of shirtsleeves, wax, tulle and pins.

Michael Pribich (the new feminist attitude ineluctably encompasses men) has made a column of folded blankets, which widens as it ascends. A mat made of large beads, like those favored by cabdrivers, is shaped over it, giving the stack an erotic look. Jeanne Tremel makes the closest thing in the show to an abstract painting by using materials like scouring pads, dental floss, steel



wool and twist ties; one work contains traditional paint, but it is applied to shelf paper.

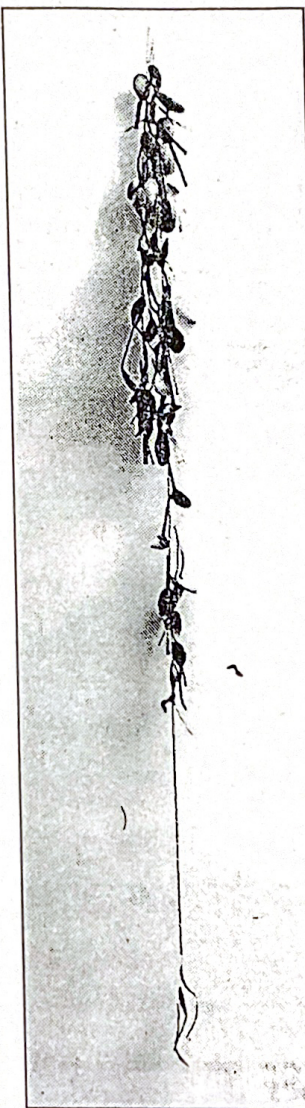
The closest thing to minimal sculpture is the floor pieces of Taylor Davis composed of wooden drawers and doors.

Repetition is the essence of the oddest work in the exhibition: Bettina Werner has made an ambiguous, but visually seductive work out of what is listed as a "patented technique of colored salt." A low table is divided in quadrants with each section covered with bright yellow salt in crystals of different grades. One area contains fist-size lumps resembling rock formations in a desert. The sculpture is accompanied by a large photograph of Ms. Werner's

hand raking through salt.

Analyzing that work is tantalizing. Salt is basic, humble and widespread, as in "salt of the earth," and this certainly fits the show's theme. Also, salt gives flavor to the ordinary, and this quality is what Ms. Thompson argues would be gained from bringing back Hestia.

The contributions of a couple of artists have moved out of the ordinary home and, therefore, might seem tangential to the exhibition. In one case, however, the work is clearly unsettling, and in the other it is clearly romantic, so finally they can be accepted as elaborations on the mundane. For several years Ellen Driscoll has been making large sculptures that refer to an over-



mental asylum in 19th-century France where women were treated for hysteria. She calls the collective work "Passionate Attitudes," and two excerpts are shown here.

Steel is a favorite material of Ms. Driscoll's, and it is usually contrasted with something vulnerable. To experience one of the works, viewers mount a small platform to peer into a large glass egg like a crystal ball in



"The High Anxiety Living Room" by Sally Minker, far left; Nene Humphrey's "Lifeline 2," and Rhonda Roland Shearer's "Girl Action Figures" (Vacuuming, floor model).

of a female patient stretched between two chairs. The other work is a large bed without a foot, and out of this structure unreels a coil of braided horsehair, a stand-in for a patient slowly losing her identity.

A sunnier feeling is provided by the bed made by Esperanza Cortes, which she calls "The Wedding Suite." Above the bed is a length of white satin material, but the bed is painted like a patchwork quilt with squares containing clay images of torsos and hands, which lend a tinge of anxiety.

A dolorous mood is certainly present in Ms. Cortes's other quiet installation, "Altar to Those Forgotten." Its focal point is a vase of clay roses, some of which have fallen on the table. Hung behind the table is a rug with blue streaks evoking rain.

Finally, high humor is not absent from the exhibition. Steven Brower's meeting of high and low culture, "You Are What You Eat," is a pizza box cut to form a major monument of Modernism, Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House. To see another work from Mr. Brower, viewers peer into a large drum of joint compound;

struction site with sheetrock walls going up. "The High Anxiety Living Room" by Sally Minker is a room-size, 3-D cartoon of an ordinary room containing a couch, rug, chair and table, but everything is cracked and split apart. Five telephone receivers hang in the air clamoring for attention, and the television set is out of whack.

Ms. Minker can also be subtly funny as demonstrated by a picture hung behind the couch, which depicts the same chaotic scene.

The traditional chafing at women's roles enters into the show but wittily, with Rhonda Roland Shearer's sardonically named "Girl Action Figures." In two vitrines are the outlined bronze figures of a woman with a shopping cart and a woman vacuuming. But there is an addition that might appeal to Hestia: these frozen-in-action models doing drudge work are also garlanded with flowers.

The exhibition was organized by Susan Hoeltzel, the director of the Lehman College Art Gallery. It continues through Oct. 29. For further