

Examining Cultural Mores in a Lehman College Exhibition

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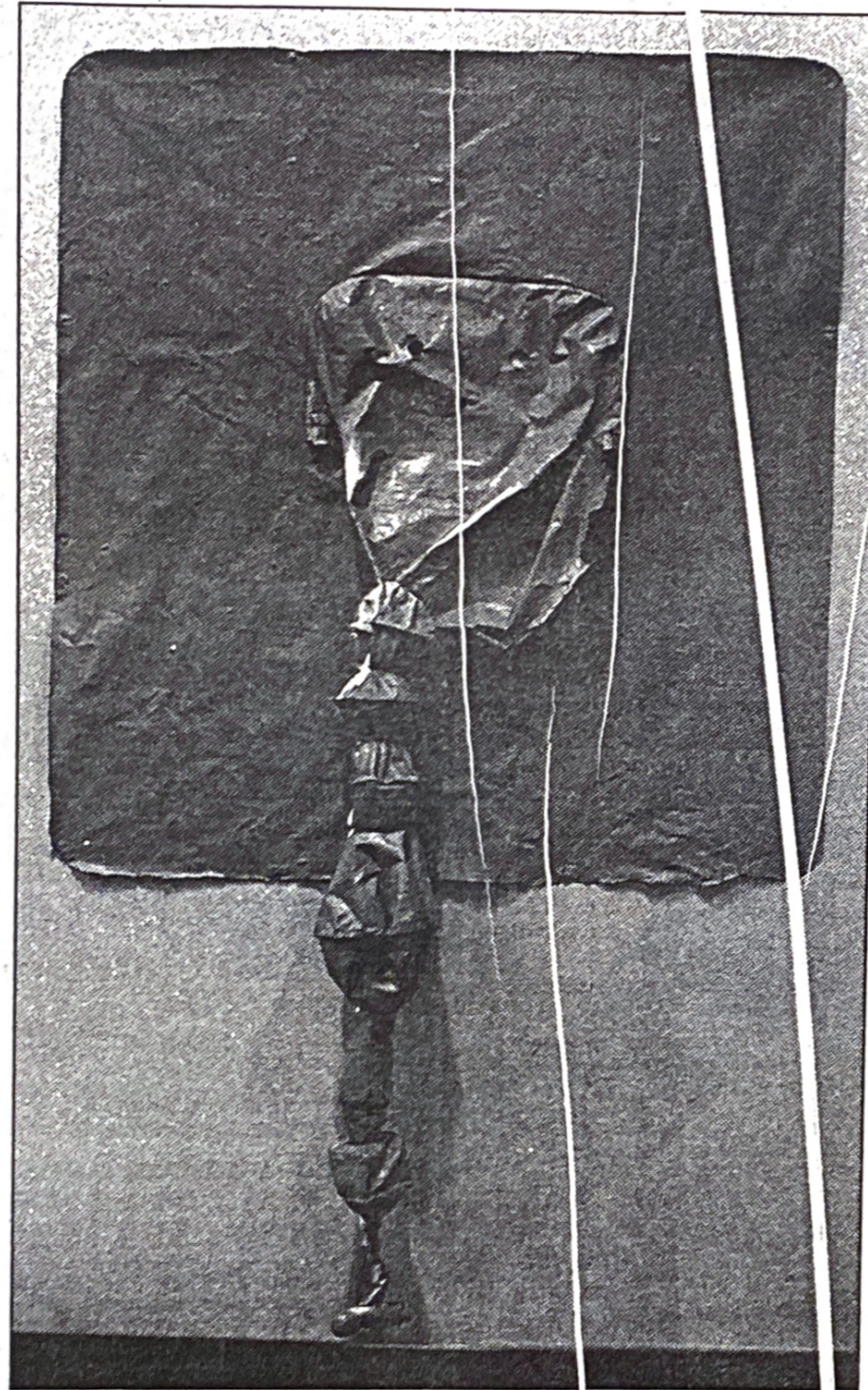
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE comes to Lehman College Art Gallery from the Procter Art Center, at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson. It was organized at the exhibition there by Molly Sullivan, an independent curator.

On the face of it, this gathering of objects and installations by eight contemporaries differs little from others of its kind to be seen in SoHo and other hip milieus. That is, the works tend to be allusive rather than self-explanatory. Some are impressive spectacles, a few have esthetic appeal and all are open to interpretation.

But for guidance, in this respect, viewers must consult the curator's catalogue essay. Having begun with the obligatory reassurance as to the works' diversity, Ms. Sullivan goes on to explain that their "corporeal presence is accentuated by the artists' explicit concerns with manipulating various materials" — the better to emphasize their surfaces. Then in the third sentence, she lets the cat out of the bag. She writes: "To be judged by the color of our skins, 'Appearances are everything,' 'Beauty is skin deep' — these are some of the cultural mores that are examined in the exhibition."

As usually happens, the more effective the object, the less clear its message. Joan Bankemper, for example, in "The Great Necromancer," enlarges a black-and-white photograph of a pre-Columbian pot to 9 by 6 feet and then covers just the image with layer upon layer of black tape. The result is visually electrifying, but it becomes less so when one learns from Ms. Sullivan that the artist, by wrapping this quintessentially female shape, intends to reinforce a sexual stereotype. By the way, Ms. Bankemper does the same for men by taping several fluorescent bars and leaning them against a wall, where they metamorphose into a black rectangle echoing that of the exit door nearby.

Working on his own, Byron Kim produces a grid of 16 3-by-2-inch panels, titled "Emmett," which is colored to represent the various skin tones of a child's anatomy, duly labeled. Thus, the pink of the flesh under the big toe differs from that of the lips; black



"The Perilous Magic of Nymphettes," left, by Pike Powers at the Lehman College Art Gallery.

In Joan Bankemper's "Great Necromancer," layers of tape cover a photograph of a pre-Columbian pot.



the narrow stratagems and empirical assumptions of the Minimalist School to include the perspective of 'artists of color.' "

Needless to say, some works are as pedestrian as their explications. They include Luca Buvoli's floor piece consisting of plexiglass cut into small shapes and combined with wires and bits of blue material shaped like babies' socks. This comes with a stream of consciousness about energy, Superman, the artist's teen-age days as a runner, and so on.

On the other hand, Pike Powers's

flayed skins of vinyl stand on their own visual merits, especially the turquoise one with the gas mask-like appendage, which might, in a pinch, protect the wearer against radiation.

Also at Lehman is "Rambusch: Craft and Design," a show celebrating the studio and workshop founded by Frode Rambusch, when he immigrated to the United States from Denmark in 1889. The company, called the Rambusch Decorating Company and still family owned, was very much a part of the Arts and Crafts movement

designates the infant's hair and the not-very-blue tint refers to the Mongolian "blue spot" at the base of the spine, which is said to distinguish certain people of Asian descent as well as American Indians.

In collaboration with Glenn Ligon, Mr. Kim produces a similar grid, half of which is black, the other half in

"flesh tones" commercially produced. Viewers who have recently arrived from Mars may need to know that the moral of this work is, "While each panel is in itself a complete painting, it is also part of a much larger community." As for the artists, they have, the curator says, "provocatively and humorously questioned

and, as demonstrated by the drawings and artifacts here, it continues to produce chandeliers, decorative hand rails, stained glass and other accessories for churches, government buildings, and the like. Rambusch clients in Manhattan have ranged from the Waldorf-Astoria to Macy's and the late, lamented Roxy Theater. The only messages in this display have to do with craftsmanship.

Both exhibitions are on view through May 28. The number to call for information is (718) 960-8732.