

# 'Suspension of Disbelief' to feature five sculptors

By Jeanette Fintz

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Sculptors' materials and how they are transformed to embody a vision are so significant in how the work ultimately convinces. The sculptors in the exhibition, "Suspension of Disbelief," at Kendall Art & Design, located at 609 Warren St., Hudson, succeed in, among other feats, bending steel to imply responsive intelligence and organic phenomena, capturing and defining radiant, pulsing spiritual energy and inventing a whimsical poetic image to contain the forces of cosmic geometry.

Equally important in convincing or surprising viewers is how and where something is placed in space, enabling them to decipher information from gestures and habitat as they might by observing a life form from outer space; i.e., what can be contextualized from their own realm of experience? The work in this show opens up five thought-provoking and complex sculptor's worlds, each in fascinating juxtaposition to the next and none suffering from the installation.

To the left of the door Arthur Gibbons plays with constructivist combinations of planes, lines spheres and cylinders in Lego-like units of steel. These animate the wall and emerge mushrooming from the floor. The leggy lengthy and goofy twist of "Looking" and the trailing tendrils of "I Forgot" suggest a familiarity with the growth habits of plants as they turn toward the light. Gibbons attempts to make us forget the true weight of steel by the way he positions and moves his wall pieces. Constellations and anarchic clusters

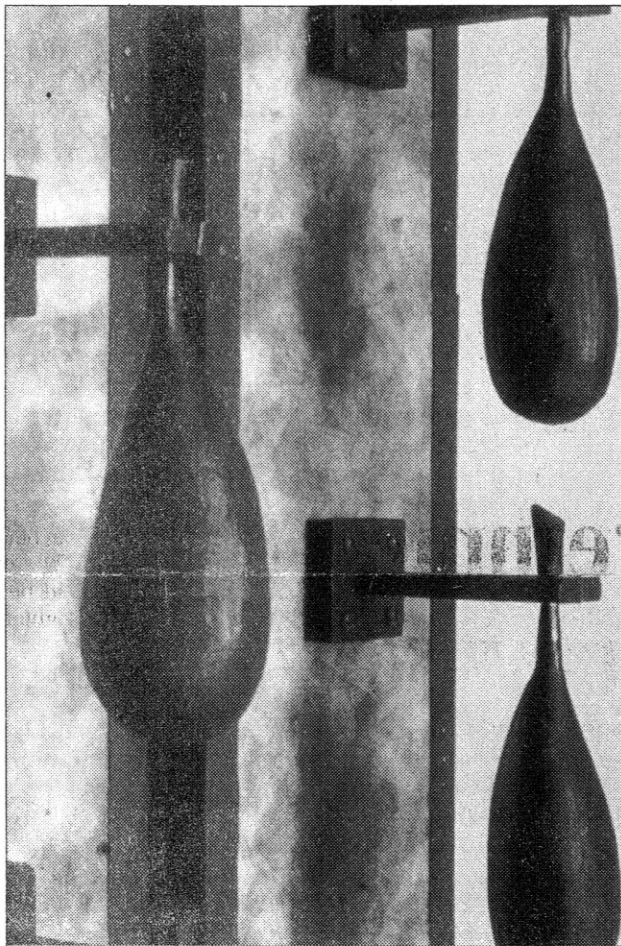
of forms double back to refer to Spanish wrought iron wall sconces gone a bit native. The "M&M"-colored tops in "Counting 1" contradict a rather familiar shape resembling a dumbbell, again invoking and subverting the macho connotations of formalist steel units, as do the hot pink and the less successful glazed tops of other pieces. The to-human-scale relationship of Gibbons' elements determine as much about how we make associations to these pieces as do their locations, their presence in our real space correlating to their potential meaning. The exceptions are two small "Scape" pieces in which the scale and location of the parts seem to refer to a specific point of view at a distance, the overlapping planes creating a more pictorial and less object centered reading.

In contrast to Gibbons, Nancy Bowen's pieces to the right of the door begin their magic with the light-

weight "crafty" connotations of beads, wire, ribbon and glass. Through her imagination and belief, Bowen has invented a vocabulary of forms inextricably dependent upon their materials for meaning. Bowen's metaphors come from Hindu meditation practices and the medieval science of alchemy, which attempted to turn base metals into gold. Her long-term engagement with glass-blowing extends the connection between materials and meaning to include process, since the glass vessel itself is invoked as the furnace in which the male principle (sulphur) and the female principle (mercury) are conjoined to produce the philosophers stone and used her perhaps as a symbol of the gold of the artist's enlightenment. The end product of transmuted polar sexual energy, also called the homunculus, a creature with a divine balance of both sets of characteristics and referred to in her drawings, is attributed to the melding of these dual forces in a glass chamber. Bowen's work is rooted in the search for self-evolution and her unifying metaphors equate the artist's process and spiritual practices with the resulting physical product — a whole new image, the art object.

Bowen's glass pieces on the rear shelf, playful in their allusions to lighting fixtures, lamps and perfume atomizers, take on a somewhat comical bulbous shape of two equally balanced forms, one smoky and pearlescent and the other wound from strands of multicolored beads. The titles, "Balanced Breath" and "Fecund Exhalation," invoke yoga breathing as well as the process of literally breathing life into a shape — or a shape into a life. The equal proportions but more obviously refined translucent surface of one still interpenetrated with the seeds (beads) of its origins connote the interdependence of each part.

If these shelf pieces are an amalgam of elegance tinged with a psychedelic funkiness, the large hanging "chandelier" style piece to the right of the front door is mostly the latter. In contrast to Gibbons who attempts to make heavy things look right, Bowen attempts to make the oddly-shaped painted mostly organic masses hanging from the ceiling appear heavy. The seven colors of the spectrum represent the seven Chakras, which means circles, sites of particular types of psychic energy in the body. In Hindu tantric yoga the movement of energy up the spine from centers corresponding to vital organs, glands and nerve centers are steps toward enlightenment. In Tibetan practice, the energy is said to move down from the crown of the head. And I was hard-pressed to determine which way to read the color shapes as they were strung together; the red tangled umbrella-like shape at the top of the piece perhaps could be interpreted as the thousand petaled lotus, but then again. ... The string or axis through the spine of this piece becomes more informative as it repeats in Bowen's other two beaded wall pieces, "Red Root" and "Viral Fantasy." Beaded root and river-like pathways represent the flow of circulatory, nervous and glandular systems. Hollow transparent glass "head" shapes, one long-necked, the other cauliflower like, adorn the top of these wall pieces, vessels ripe for illumination. They are in dire need of wall support since their weight is in incongruously precarious contrast to their delicately beaded bodies. The visual and ideological metaphor is again from Hindu



"The Sweet Pods of Abelia" by Pamela Wallace

tantric practice, which describes the Chakras as beads strung on an etheric axis which parallels the spine.

One of the most successful pieces in the show, Rob Van Erve's "Mon Bateau est sur l'; octaedro, (ou est ton bateau?)" involves metaphysical allusions of a quirky individual sort. This piece suspended from many strands of fishing line from the ceiling has the quality of a child's mobile, but generates a quiet romance in the gallery. A white plastic and plexi-glass octagon, fit and cut into the shape of a transparent octagonal tunnel holds a lonely paper boat and a quantity of contained air, but no water. The central negative shape of uncontained air becomes a charged area open to the real world but encircled by the octagon. The whole structure is perfectly stabilized by silver colored fishing weights. I was initially disturbed by there being no water, but soon opened to the potential of this being a circumscribed child's vision of their world, perhaps not unlike Truman's in "The Truman Show." The child may not know what holds him up or what keeps him stable or afloat because his world is circular and self-referential, as an artist's world also often is. Van Erve is interested in old maps and perhaps the octagon shape in his work is an attempt to describe roundness and circularity through a flattened shape.

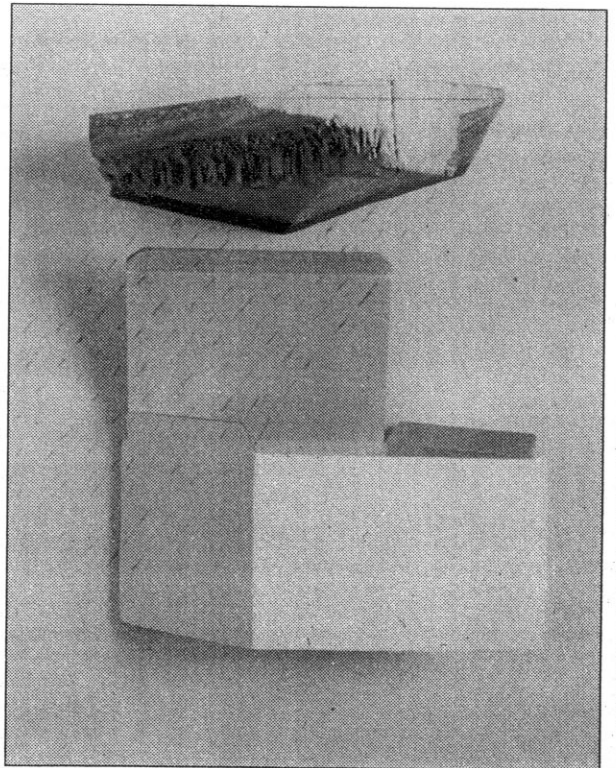
Interpreted this way, the octagon is a perfect sectioning of the circle, as it might be in a mandala or meditation diagram. As the little boat goes potentially everywhere but actually nowhere on the flat plane of the octagon, the whole world is inside the volume of air contained within the perimeter of the tube. The physical sensation of compressing volume into flatness is reinterpreted by the two silver star paper pieces on the upper gallery level. These pieces reproduce the physical impaction of one world ambiguously inside the larger continuum of another, as the seven-pointed star is impacted into a brick-like grid of rectangles. Contained, immovable and suggesting circularity, the seven-pointed stars might refer back to Bowen's Chakras, mandalas or the yearning for the wholeness and symmetry of the circle. Van Erve's site-specific plaster piece, taken from a mold of the gallery floor repeats the themes of containment, impaction and continuity, fitting two octagons into each other, one a reworked plaster-filled plastic octagon, echoing the hanging piece.

Joe Smith's delightful work, "Rain Box," also makes good use of the physical properties of the gallery, staging a diagonal cast shadow and applying penciled-in raindrops directly to the

wall. Smith evokes a surprising amount of atmosphere through this apparently random fragment of plaster and oblique cardboard box. He subverts our expectations in his two furniture derived pieces, "Store" and "Untitled," balancing formalist principles with Dadaist concepts. The oak and stone table surface scrapped away on one side and piled with black stones on the other suggests contrast between a carving and an accretion mode. Both can be viewed as signs of damage in this piece — one a scar, one a series of tumors marring the once smooth face of the table. In the beautifully presented "Store," a drugstore '50s green painted shelf stacked with shiny enameled surfaced masonite panels, self-consciously arranged against one another is at once an eerie reference to barren book covers, grid painting and planar constructivist color.

Pamela Wallace's gorgeously refined pieces crafted from oak, steel, iron and plaster are the most truly formalist in character. Her repetitive use of tapering steel and bulbous pod forms in "So Many" and "the Sweet Pods of Abelia" suggest rhythmic counting systems and the kinetic and aural possibilities of musical instruments. The piece "One Taper" is the simplest and least relief-like in the group, projecting at 90 degrees from the wall and appearing to be a cross between a shallow bow and a stringed instrument. Wallace's elegant graphite and charcoal drawings are rich reinterpretations of her predominantly pictorial concerns. Her work may contain a cryptic subtext, but needs none to provide satisfying visual pleasure.

This dense and varied exhibit continues through Monday.



"Rain Box" by Joe Smith