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JEDD GARET

JAY COOGAN

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For contributions to this catalogue HALLWALLS would like to thank the following:

<i>Typesetting:</i>	Sassy Graphics
<i>Photography:</i>	Tom Damrauer (for Diane Bertolo) Eeva-Inkeri (for Jedd Garret)
<i>Design:</i>	G. Roger Denson
<i>Editing:</i>	William Currie
<i>Lenders:</i>	The Artists Adam Baumgold William and Diane Currie Monique Knowlton Gallery Mr. and Mrs. Gerrit Lansing The Robert Miller Gallery Fred Mueller Nancy Peskin Bette Ziegler

Special thanks should be extended to John Cheim, of the Robert Miller Gallery and Monique Knowlton for their assistance in the selection of the work and its loan to HALLWALLS. Also to William Currie for his support and for his superb directorship, and to Jerry Einstandig for his patience and printing.

This publication has been prepared in conjunction with the concurrent one-person exhibitions by Jedd Garet, Jay Coogan and Diane Bertolo, curated by G. Roger Denson for HALLWALLS, 700 Main Street, Buffalo, New York 14202.

Funding for this exhibition and catalogue has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, The New York State Council for the Arts, and funds from the Erie County Legislature, administered through the Arts Development Services, Inc.

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500 Copies Printed
Octobergraphics
Buffalo, New York

INTRODUCTION

In assembling the work for these three one-person exhibitions, and while researching my material on each of the artists, I was surprised to discover that despite all their many differences, these artists all had one thing in common. Each one dismisses an overly rational and systematic approach to making art. Although each of the three is highly articulate in discussing their work, they are concerned with the articulation of verbal ideas only in retrospect. What they rely upon in making their work is not a lucid, formulated scheme, but an unsure, trial-and-error reliance on their intuitive faculties. Of course, art has been made this way for centuries, but the twentieth century has been anything but inclined to the purely aesthetic response. More specifically, the fact that this generation of artists are relying on qualities of beauty is all the more surprising when one realizes that they have come of age as artists during the heyday of minimalism and conceptualism. There had never previously been an epoch in art as rigorously cerebral and as severely austere as the sixties and early seventies. In this light it seems quite remarkable that these artists were able to pass through this plethora of systems and still could have emerged with this brave lyricism. One must be made aware that process-art and minimalism have certainly left their mark on all three of these artists. It is just that they have allowed themselves the luxury (though oh-so-carefully) of indulging in a sensual appreciation of beauty.

G. Roger Denson

JEDD GARET

A spectre is haunting the art world, and that spectre is Jedd Gareth. Favoring a twilight region between the literal and the metaphysical, his paintings have the grace of coherent allegories and the detachment of a creator who is a hermit of the nuclear age, fleeing the world of external things.

It is not Gareth's goal to understand the empirical world of forms. Rather, it is his will to adapt that world to his own subjective aesthetic expectations. He is the atomic alchemist of art, synthesizing disparate pictorial expressions for the purpose of exploiting hidden meaning. The meaning most interesting to him, however, is that which it expresses, not that which it might signify. When his paintings are grouped together in an insightful way, they express a remarkably allegorical arcana of beauty and angst in an ominous and precarious age.

While I sit here writing, the full meaning of angst overtakes me as I receive news from my television that Anwar Sadat has been assassinated; his body shot full of holes. I shudder at the reality of the image, while at the same time longing for escape. This universal longing for peace and beauty in the midst of a catastrophic world is what makes Gareth's paintings so compelling. It is appropriate that Gareth's images should strike one as being ominous and full of anxiety in an era where international arsenals of nuclear warheads are proliferating at alarming rates. Gareth intuitively absorbs the world-wide confusion and disorder in the collective consciousness and corresponds it to similar conditions in the mind of the individual.

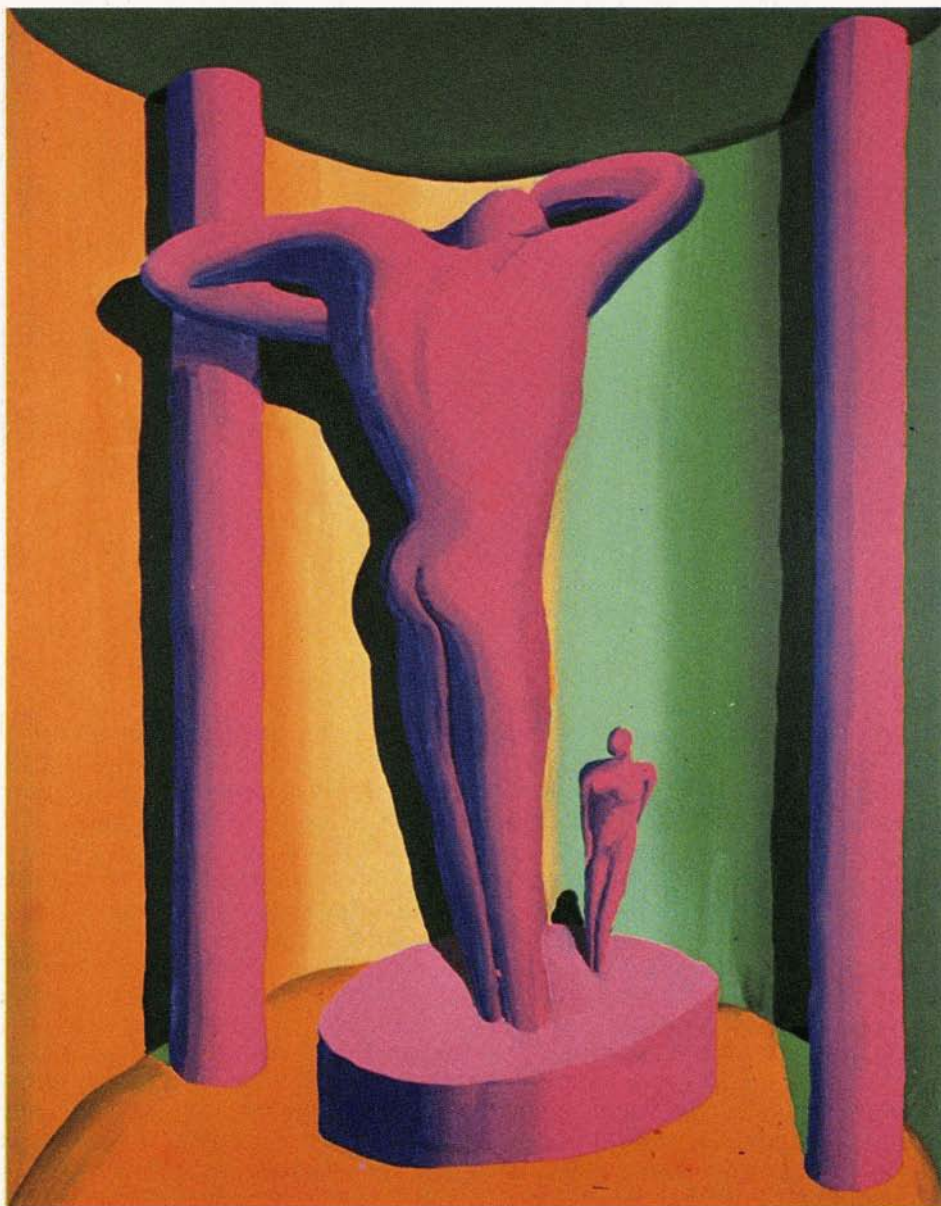
Ironically enough it is this complex of confusion, disorder and fear from which comes what Jung has called "a longing that flows out of the inner opposition and the tearing asunder". Goethe refers to the same so lyrically as the "Eros of the distant vision".

Gareth's peculiar vision has a remarkable depth of field. His pictures contain elements of the augur and the primeval in one. In some of his paintings these elements stretch almost to the pathological. Seemingly, there is no limitation to his lofty flight of mind, or to his descent into the depths of anonymity, darkness and guilt.

Gareth's android/humanoid/statues appear to be the shadow of our hidden personalities. Beset by anxiety, they cringe in fear, are divided by difference, or are in the act of seeking enlightenment. They exhibit all the searching qualities, all the discordant tensions of our dreams. They are that part of each one of us which confronts new forms of existence and is consequently rendered instable, insecure and suggestible.

Gareth's reliefs are even more anonymous without pictorial contexts. "Servant" and "New Servant" embody the shadow, the hidden, subterranean aspect of the personality. They are the anima archetype, the soul image, the submissive self. Gareth's depiction of the shadow servant might be interpreted as the product of his conscious learning to adjust to his inner shadow. "New Servant" in particular portrays the submission to a gold bar, the embodiment of an external, energized order.

Despite their often lurid coloring, there is an austere, even somber sensibility underlying his work. Gareth wonders how a critic might conclude that his paintings evoke the coming of the end (as did Kim Levin in *Flash Art*, Summer 1981). But the solemn, exquisitely bizarre beauty of many of his landscapes is easily seduced by such interpretations as these. The ashen grey-blues of the night sky, the deathly barrenness of the land and the ruinous perspective of a



Pink Statue, 1979
72" x 56"
acrylic on canvas
Collection of Mr. Fred Mueller

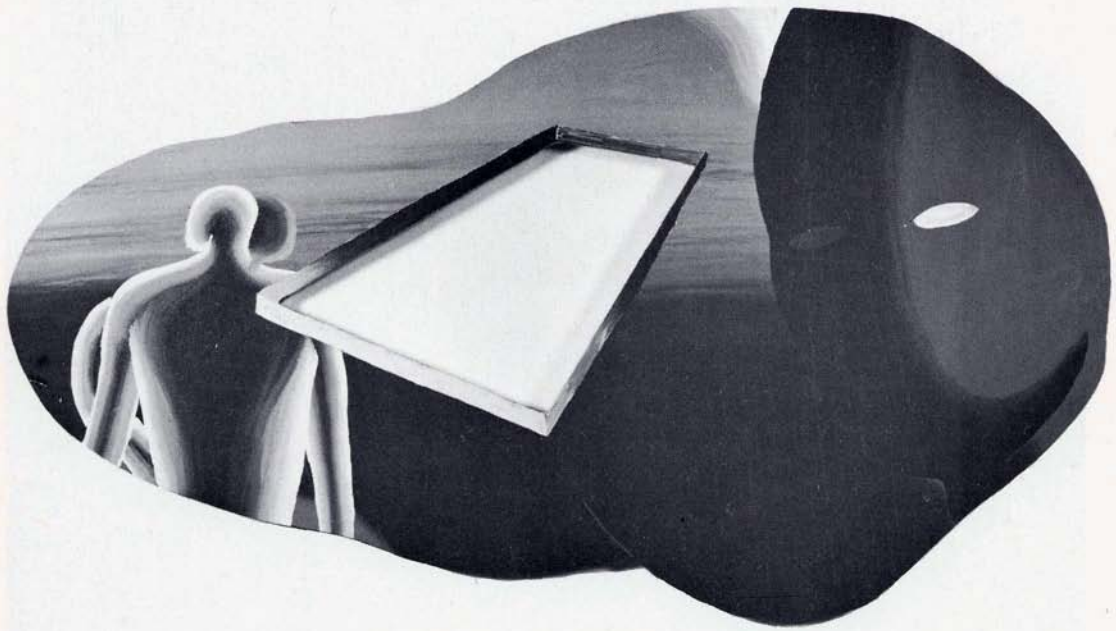


Globe, 1979
22½" x 48"
wood, fabric, bowling ball
Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery

Le Corbusier-styled structure, combine into a haunting image that taps many of our inner fears. It is not as much an evocation of some catastrophic holocaust which penetrates our psychic domain. We have been by now too over saturated with such stereotypic, media-ridden imagery to be effected in this way. By contrast, Gareth's landscapes and architectural depictions do not simply penetrate through the senses, as do most messages from the external world. These pictures summon phantasms of another order; messages which are dredged up from the well of our inner being.

In this way, Gareth illicitly comparison with Giorgio de Chirico, the early Surrealist painter. De Chirico forged some of the most forceful images of a metaphysical world which intersects with the imagery of the senses. Gareth, like de Chirico, creates a world, not just of alienation, but of estrangement. He conveys the same illusionism of metaphysical space and time as had de Chirico; the same fullness of shadow; the same juxtapositioning of the fantastic with the banal. But where as de Chirico relied upon shock as his propulsion into (or away from) the public realm, Gareth relies upon a lurid style and a vivid, stimulating aesthetic.

If anyone doubts that allegory has a place in Gareth's work, all one has to do is pay close attention to some of the titles and then examine the cryptic nature of the imagery. "The Last Couple", "Fear of Nature", "Flaming Colosus", "Contemplation of the Little Geometries", "Oval Enemies", "Virtue", "Jealousy", and "One Way Mirror". These paintings are every bit as allegorical as the



Pirates Penalty, 1981
48" x 87"
acrylic on canvas
Collection of Bette Ziegler

Icones Symbolicae of Sacchi, Botticelli, Rosetti and legions of other illustrious masters. It might seem bizarre to associate Gareth with these historic figures, some dead for centuries. The reason for this seeming perversity is that the allegorical and analogous arts have been, on the whole, divorced from the modern sensibility in painting. After such a long absence it becomes difficult to recognize and assess the allegorical in new styles and forms.

We are witnessing a revival of interest in the allegorical and the analogous, especially in the painting of such European artists as Sandro Chia and Francesco Clemente. Jedd Gareth is one of the few American painters (along with Julian Schnabel) who has emerged with a natural sense for the allegorical implications of imagery in the eighties. More than the others, however, Gareth is stylistically and thematically indicative of lifestyles and world views in a nuclear age.

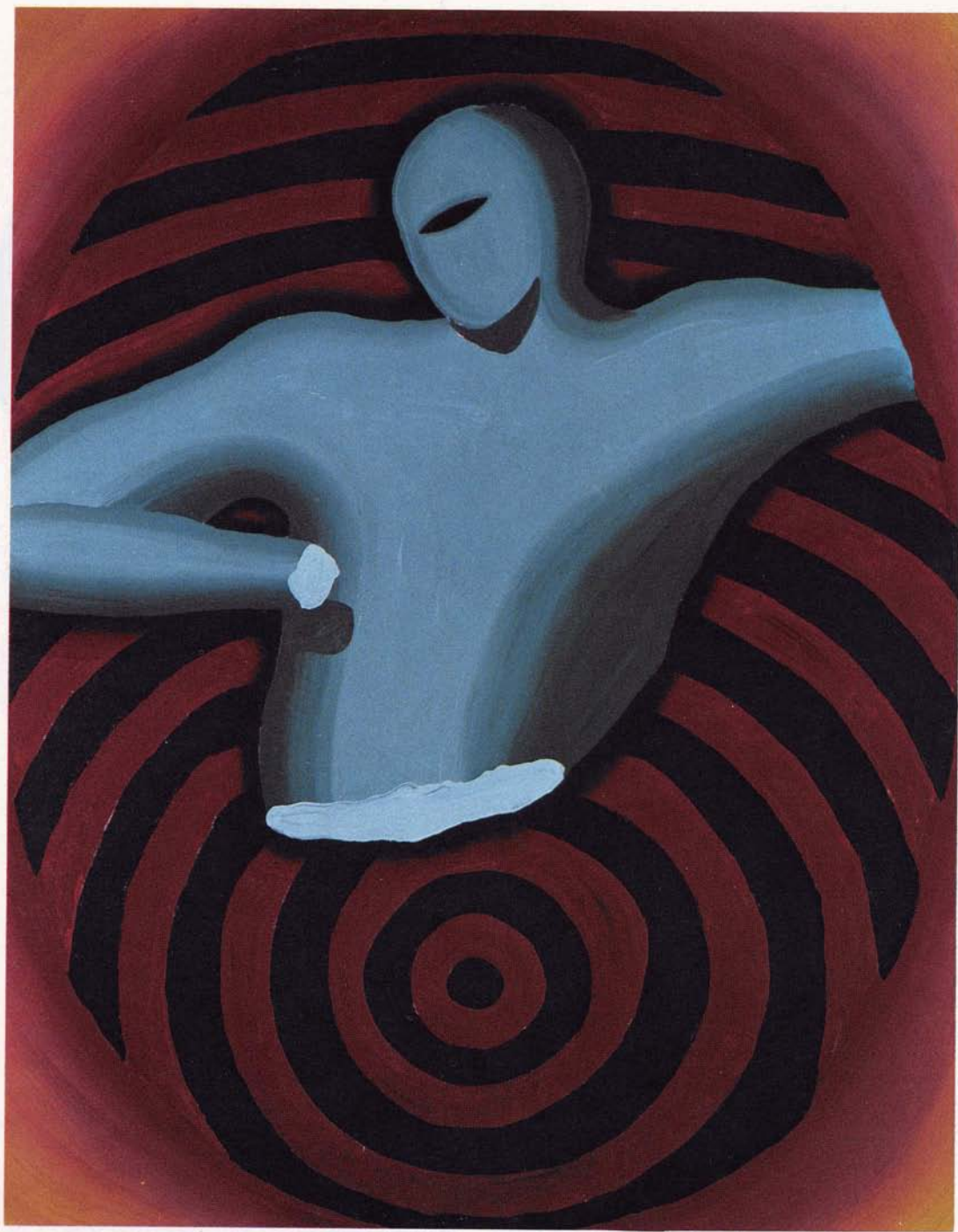
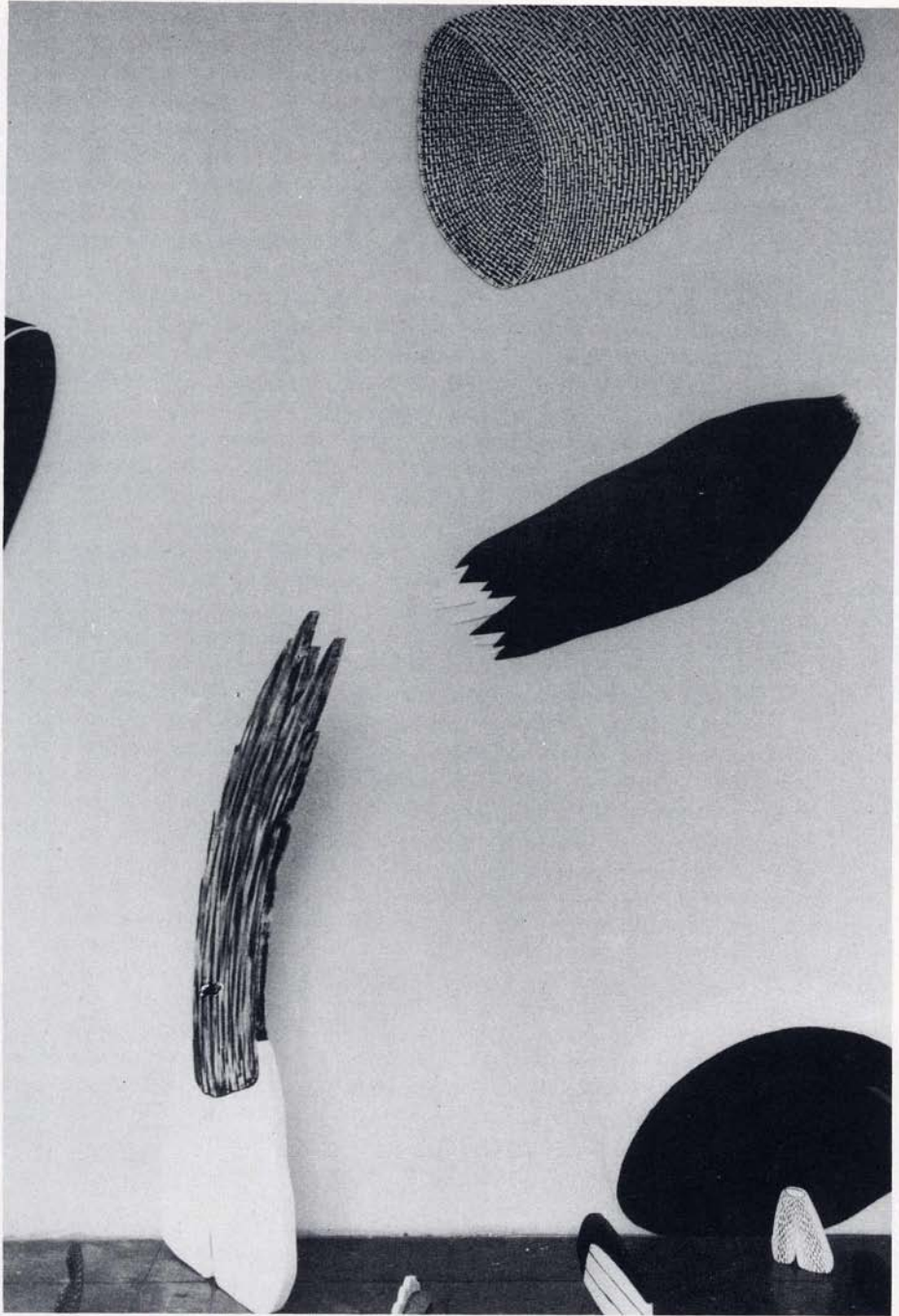


Figure Eight, 1981
73" x 57"
acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery



New Servant, 1981
47" x 32" x 7"
acrylic on wood, chicken wire, papier mache'
and modelling paste construction



Installation detail from
"New Work/New Artists", Hal Bromm Gallery, 1981
acrylic on masonite constructions
Courtesy of Monique Knowlton Gallery

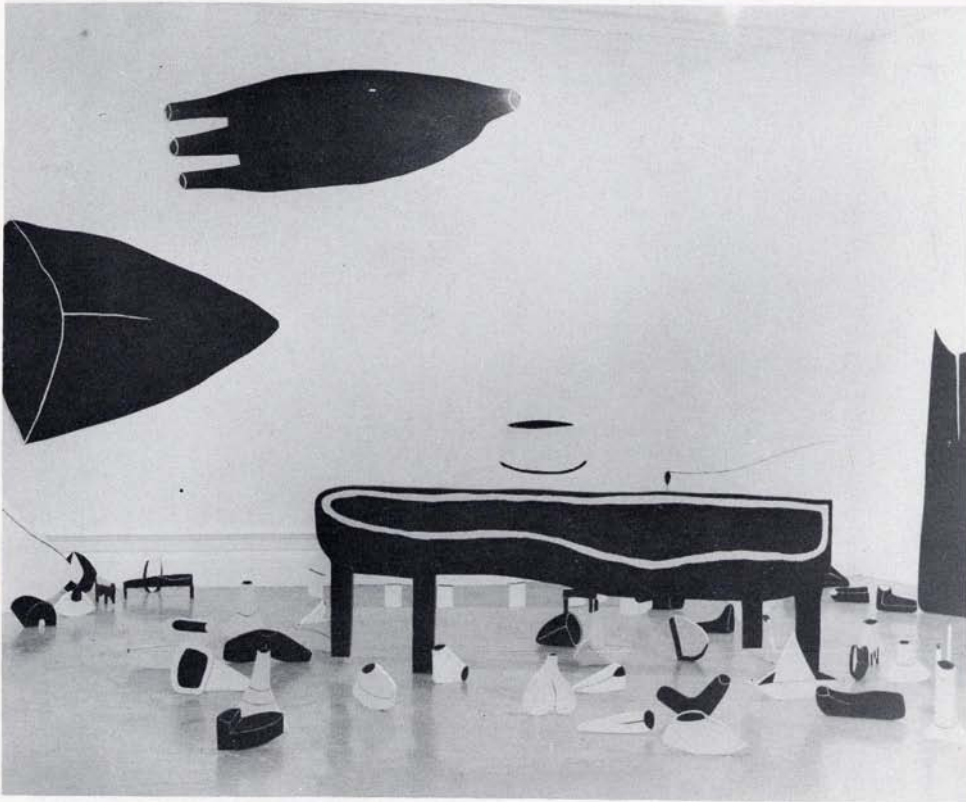


Installation detail from
"Child's Play: Wit and Whimsey
in Contemporary Sculpture", Queens Museum, 1981,
acrylic on masonite constructions
Courtesy of Monique Knowlton Gallery

JAY COOGAN

Imagine listening to a monologue delivered in a foreign language; a soliloquy of sounds uninterpretable to the listener. Grammar and syntax become lost within the context of unfamiliarity, along with meaning. Everything is a string of sounds: phonetic or phonemic, depending upon the acuteness of the listener. The morphemic level of language, that being the most elementary and most irreducible stage of meaning investment, becomes unattainable without repeated exposure. The listener learns to content himself with the intonation and accent of sounds or the style of their organization.

Now let us reduce the phenomenon of language further. Imagine listening to the utterances of a baby or small child. The child's expressions have intonation. Sounds are repeated in patterns. The most attractive sounds to the child are repeated over and over until they lose their interest value. There is no syntax, no sequential ordering of sounds. Sounds are uttered in clusters for sheer delight.



Installation detail from
"Selection", Artists Space, 1981,
acrylic on masonite constructions
Courtesy of Monique Knowlton Gallery

Visually, the same type of visceral phenomenon can be demonstrated to operate in the work of artist Jay Coogan. A blend of painting and sculpture, his work might be classified as coinciding somewhere between that range of human knowledge which is unconscious subjective form (as is the baby's soundmaking) and that which is conscious objective form which is learned (as is the unfamiliar language).

Coogan's main reason for constructing his stream-of-consciousness forms is to parallel the perceptual and cognitive processes in life. Learning is enabled only through encounters with the outside world. But these forms cannot always be thought about even if they are always perceptually encountered.

It is this perception sans formulated thought which intrigues Coogan. His masonite constructions actually simulate the objects of involuntary perception, impressed upon our visual sense as images, not things. This is not to say that his art is without meaning. For the concept of image necessarily implies



Installation detail from
"New Work/New Artists", Hal Bromm Gallery, 1981
acrylic on masonite constructions
Courtesy of Monique Knowlton Gallery

the presence of meaning. Coogan's meaning, however, is not about the contents of thought, only the sub-language of abstract forms.

This parallel is only superficial however, for although Coogan is interested in involuntary perception, art demands a voluntary, reflexive stance. I must make it clear that one can *imitate* the involuntary and subliminal, but one can only do so with a voluntary *intention*. Coogan's artmaking is a conscious, formulated process. His ensembles of forms are placed in ordered configurations, just as is a syntactical language. The meaning of his forms- individually or in conjunction, escapes us, as does a language which is unfamiliar. Despite their incomprehensible meaning and syntax, they are quite pleasurable, as is a foreign accent or an exotic intonation of voice.

There are some basic differences, however, between Coogan's work and the model of an unfamiliar language. To begin with, Coogan's forms (their syntax, so to speak) are interchangeable. His constructions can stand alone or with



Installation detail from
"New Work/New Artists", Hal Bromm Gallery, 1981,
acrylic on masonite constructions
Courtesy of Monique Knowlton Gallery

wholly new and varying combinations in a given space. Perhaps, more importantly, is the difference between the subjectivity of Coogan's forms and the required objectivity of a cultural language. This language has to be shared and accessible to those who require its use. But the artmaking of Coogan is not a shared process, and in this case, is particularly idiosyncratic; a personal product of a very individual nervous system. Who could translate the meaning of his forms? A form might resemble a grand piano, a smokestack, a pepper, a basket, etc.- but the resemblance is always questionable.

Formal manipulations are of a greater interest to Coogan than meaning. The "flatness" of his individual sculptures demand an interpretation radically different from sculpture in the round. À la David Smith, Coogan concentrates all his formal energies into the fronts and backs of his sculpture. Frontal planes are designated with the function of conveying the most important information about form. Just as we address the front of a person, we address our primary inquiry to the front of Coogan's forms. Coogan insists that the backs of his sculpture are also important for imparting information, though it is usually secondary in nature. It is not that Coogan wishes to avoid lateral information, it is just that he wishes to eliminate a great deal of the three-dimensional, tactile information. This he does for the purpose of arriving at form by two-dimensional implication, rather than by actual realization.

Coogan's dimensional dialectics grew out of earlier explorations in more conventional sculptural form. His volumes were once rounded and biomorphic, made from materials such as plaster, paper and fabric maché. They depict an organic life natural to rural areas or beaches, as many of his current shapes still do. But now there are greater varieties of form. Coogan contrasts his rural sensibility with urban forms that often resemble unrelated bin objects at hardware or thrift-stores. As Coogan experimented more with drawing, his sculptures took on flatter proportions. He began using a jigsaw to cut out his forms in masonite and then assembled and painted them in black and white acrylic to resemble the drawings.

Coogan considers color to be too inviting to the emotions and prefers the distancing effect of black and white. Emotional responses are specific and Coogan is attempting to delineate the general outline of form. Coogan is also partial to the unifying power of black and white and its impact upon controlled situations.

Despite the austerity of Coogan's reasoning, he is quite pleased that many viewers associate his painted shapes with cartoons. There is a comical quality which animates these objects. They seem as if they have assembled in a child's story, after everyone has fallen asleep. They have that sense of wonder about them.

DIANE BERTOLO

Intuition might be said to be the single most unifying attribute characterizing the body of Diane Bertolo's work. Her intuitive skill at isolating and recombining objects and images is a non-methodical process which must be emphasized in the making of art. For it is the process of making art which Bertolo regards as a direct route to self-evident knowledge.

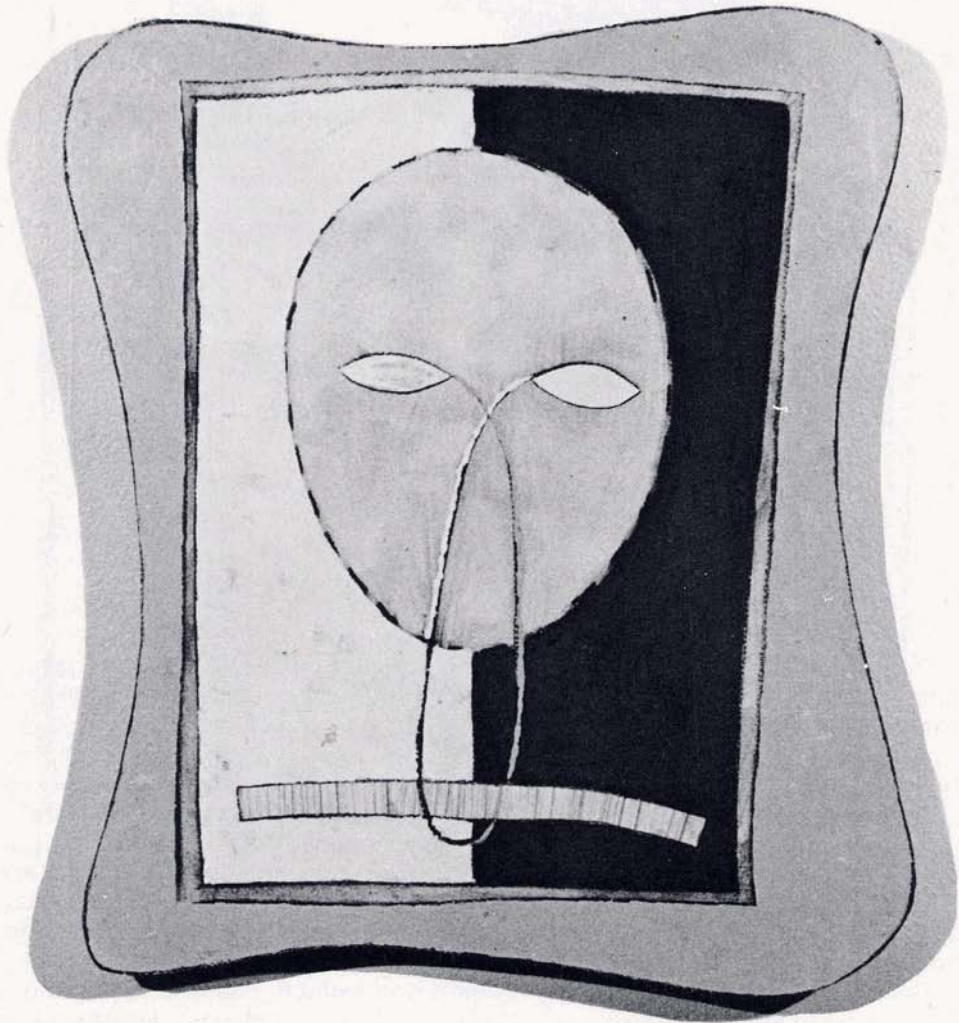
The isolation of form is natural to her frame of mind. By lifting image-forms out of their found contexts, Bertolo is inquiring about a knowledge of these forms' plastic qualities. She seeks out those forms of visual thought which are most fixed and permanent, overlooking the transient examples of specific sensation. Consequently, many of Bertolo's drawings and paintings appear as playful geometries, intellectually and schematically derived. But Bertolo's "geometry" is in most part intuited, issuing knowledge not of procedure, but of results. This intuition is in her own words a kind of "learning by perverse accident."

The perversity of Bertolo's learning resides within her manner of seeking form. Bertolo looks for knowledge of form, not in nature, as would an adherent of Platonic or Pythagorean principles, but in diagrams that have been mass produced. Growing up in the second half of the twentieth century has meant growing up with the mass production of books, diagrams, art prints, commercial design and lessons in a step-by-step illustrated fashion. It seems as though that in many ways learning through the free inquiry of our minds has been superseded by the ever increasing erudition of an institutionalized education. In such a conditioned environment, Bertolo's natural response in the world has been one of artificial aesthetics.

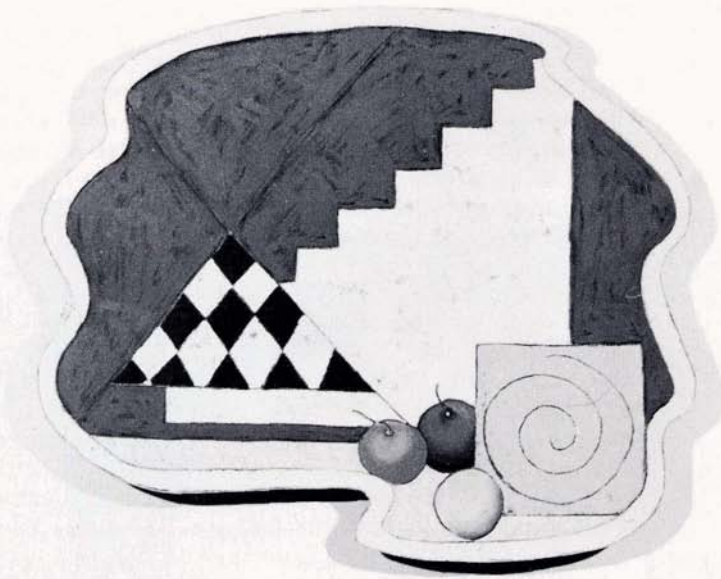
Although her knowledge of forms may be direct, her source for knowledge is already second generation. The knowledge inherent within a reproduced image becomes a found object in Bertolo's storage of abstractions. But this process is a highly selective one. Most of those selected are simple illustrations. How-to-draw hands and heads; spirals and cones drawn from multiple vantage points; perspective grids; fleur-de-lis emblems and wallpaper: all contribute to the erudite index that the artist compiles.

For quite a few years now Bertolo has explored the possibilities of extending the painted surface onto plaque-like constructions, usually with a flat surface made from cardboard or construction board. These plaques were often painted in some systematic order suitable either to the shape of the plaque or to whatever psychological implication it might have had for her. Recent plaques are made on paper and mounted on wood. They have a more decorative function, that being the simple support on and away from the wall. The spatial interval between the plaque and the wall allows light and shadow to play a more active role in defining and framing the contour of the plaque, emphasizing the flatness of the pictorial plane.

Bertolo also has a long standing interest in applying different painterly textures to her grounds. She often manipulates the pigment to expand the surface's tactile appeal. This has been done in a variety of ways. There have been times when she has applied the acrylic paint onto the surface in protuberant points. At other times the paint is spread on in delicious swirls, as if it were icing on a cake.



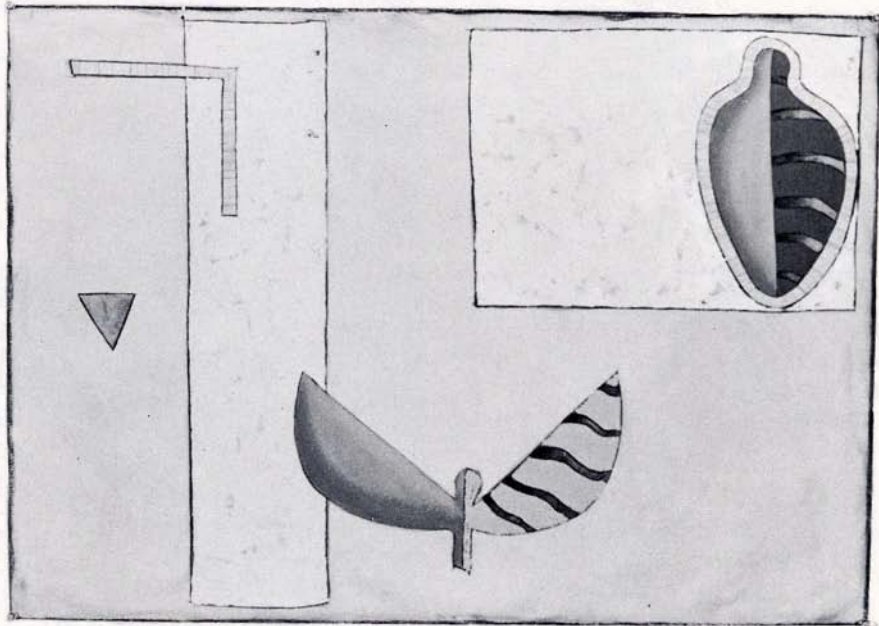
Two Leaves With Entwining Stem, 1981
23½" x 19¼" x 2"
acrylic, charcoal, enamel on paper
mounted on plywood



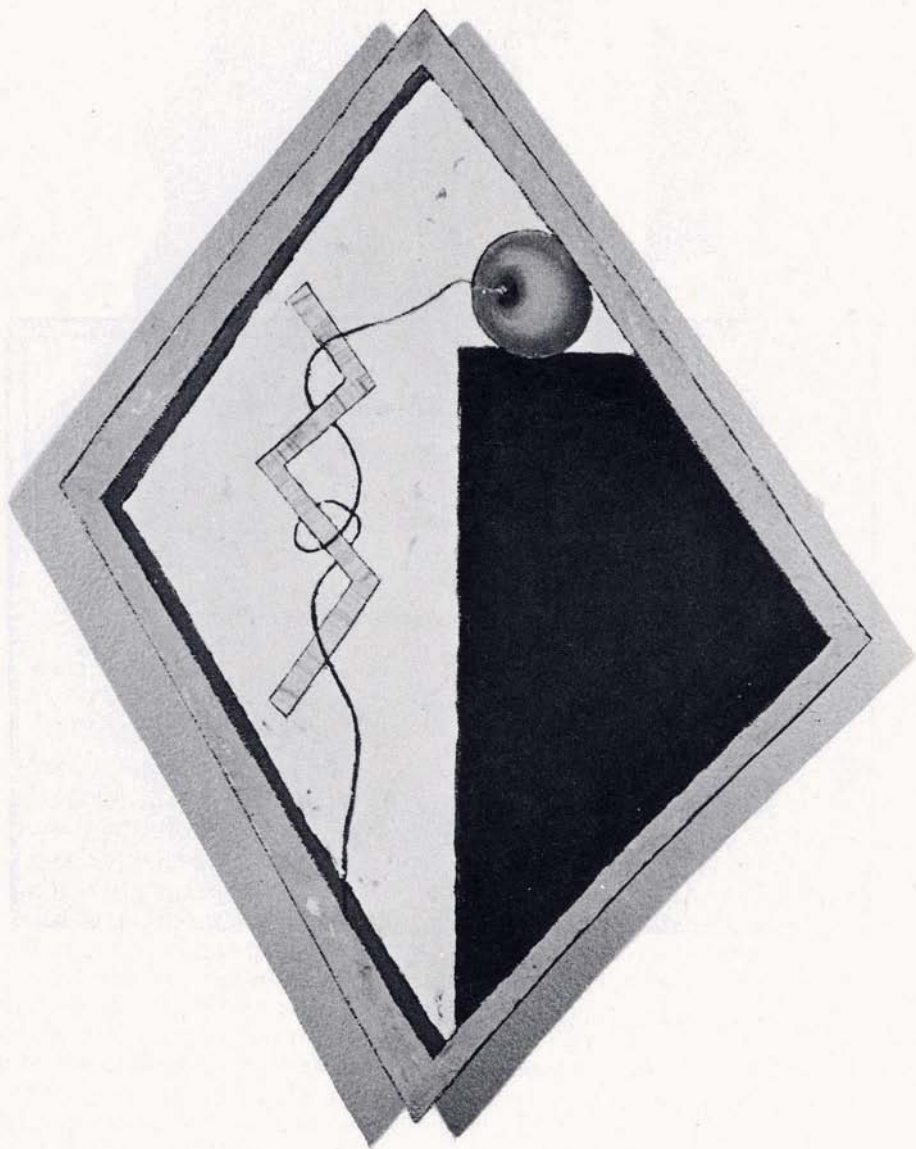
Vignette, 1981
26¼" x 22" x 2"
acrylic, charcoal, enamel and
contact paper on paper
mounted on plywood

Recently, Bertolo has confined the color of all her painting to the muted monochromes of black, grey and off-white. This can be in part attributed to her calculating isolations, but more so to the fact that she is using the black and white reproductions of colored paintings as the models for her work's tonality. Bertolo is intrigued by the way in which tonality can be used to substitute for color and subsequently impose a unity on the work. Her analagous greys refer in general to the infinite gradation of photographic half-tones which substitute for the middle-spectral range in a colored universe. Her black hues act in place of the cold, blue tones and her light-to-whites substitute for the warmer reds-to-yellows. Her controlled modifications resist light while her half-tones operate in areas which light can only partially occupy.

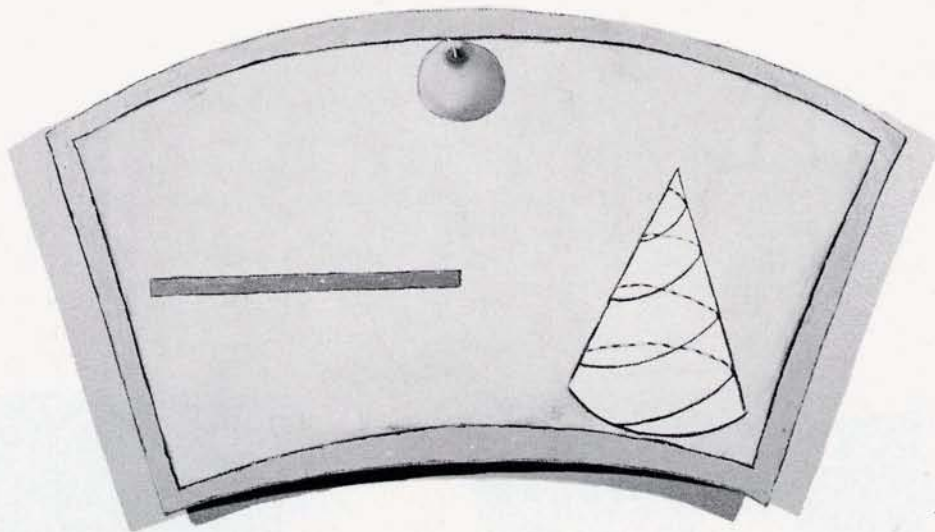
Bertolo's linear talents are also elegant and refined. Her line is in general suggestive of stasis. There is very little allusion to movement in works such as "Lesson From Three Dead Artists and An Architect". The sharp, thin linearity effects a more static composition. Irregular and convoluted lines are used consistantly, as in the work "Two Leaves With Entwining Stem". Nonetheless, the overall effect of even such an organic depiction implies little more than a quiet direction of line.



Lesson From Three Dead Artists and An Architect, 1981
27¹/₄" x 38³/₄"
acrylic, charcoal, contact paper on paper



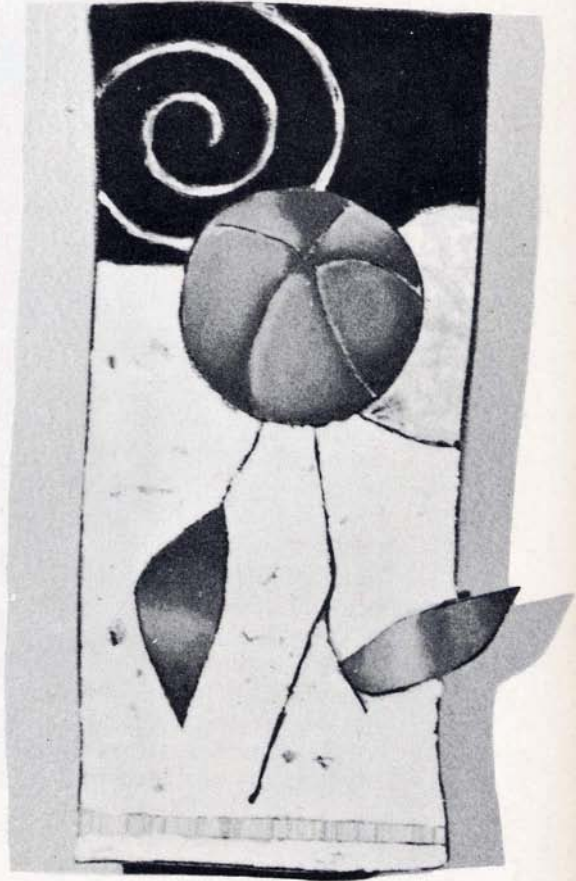
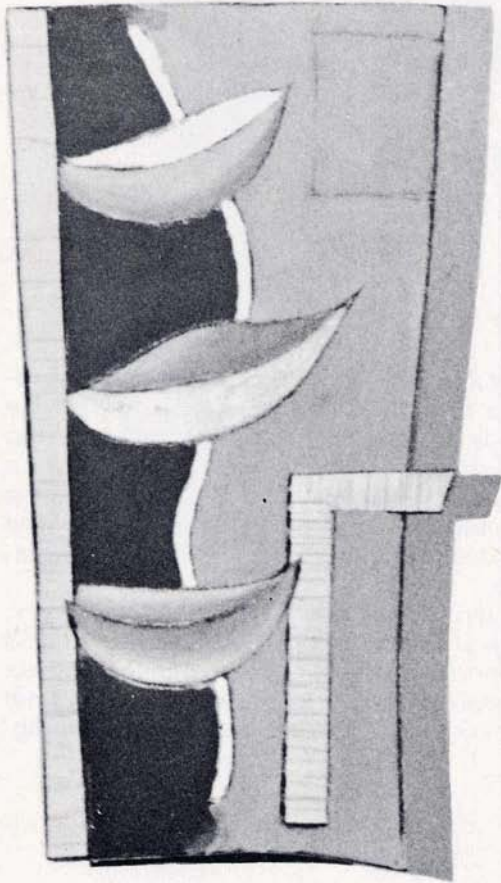
A Truthful Representation, 1981
27½" x 20" x 2"
acrylic, charcoal, enamel, contact paper
mounted on plywood



Slice of Life #4, 1981
16" x 27½" x 2"
acrylic and charcoal on paper
mounted on plywood

The function of line for Bertolo is primarily a tool for the duplication of reproduced imagery. Bertolo is using line as a kind of tracing and recording device of those reproductions which she finds most interesting. The lines are then isolated in a process of abstraction so that only a fragment of the artist's composition is alluded to. More often than not, this allusion is placed in some strategic relationship to allusions made to other artists and artwork. The finished product exhibits various modes of drawing in a single, representationally convincing stilllife of forms.

Tonality, shape and line are the most crucial elements in Bertolo's work. Their combined impact stress the issue of familiarity of pictorial forms. For this reason I stop from investing any deeper emblematic meaning into the body of her work. Like psychological archetypes, Bertolo's forms are universal, but her formal depictions are too precise in their clarity to be rendered as the ambiguous forms of a loaded allegory.



Four Decorator Plaques, 1981
4) 18" x 9" x 2"
acrylic, charcoal, enamel, contact paper on paper
mounted on plywood

