

## Sculpture '94

This exhibition of sculpture includes the work of three artists. Lanny Bergner and Rebecca Johnson live and work in Philadelphia, while Joseph Nacastri is a Miami-based artist. They share a deep commitment to three-dimensional expression, although each artist has developed an individualized, expressive vocabulary. Through divergent points of view and the use of space, Rebecca Johnson and Lanny Bergner create a dialogue embracing nature and including man's place within its confines. Joseph Nacastri, on the other hand, uses natural objects in his compositions as symbols of man's individual occupation with birth, life, love, death, and above all, hope, thus confronting the natural span of human life. Nature and the nature of human behavior consequently evolve as the common thread shared by Bergner, Johnson, and Nacastri. This fine thread of similarity stretches when we view the work of each of the artists. Their use of materials, form, color, weight, and points of view leads us through three-dimensional space in very special ways.

Interior earthworks, where the opposing forces of "man versus earth, beauty versus pain, seduction versus repulsion, manmade versus organic," and the precarious relationship humans have with their environment, are several of the descriptions Lanny Bergner uses in describing his work. These descriptions are evident in the use of materials as they relate to the forms created by Lanny Bergner. In the catalogue from Bergner's exhibition, *Earth Bound*, (1992 Marian Locks Gallery, Philadelphia), Patricia Stewart describes Lanny's work, "It's a weirdly evocative mix, a marriage between Heaven and Hell, or at least of organic and petrochemical."

In an effort to create the perfect form relating to the figure and to the earth, Lanny Bergner's installation *Persona*, comprised of five hanging components, is fashioned after the symmetrical and balanced plum-bob. Through the use of manmade substances such as shiny sensual

or nature of the object. Fashioning forms that relate to the environmental stimuli she has absorbed, her sculpture points to a quietly sad melancholy. Defining the relationship man is creating with nature, Rebecca presents a foreboding future defined by a clear understanding of the natural environment.

In the piece, *Column of Smoke*, the base is a charred, large square log. Greyish-blue, carved forms resembling clouds interrupt the top column-like projection. The forms are heavy in weight and color, and the surfaces, although manipulated by Johnson, are aligned with the natural materials as in a cooperative give-and-take between the artist and her environment.

There is a quietude about the work, a sensitivity felt in the piece called *Just Be*. It is a bench, the bases of which are carved walnut, with the seat piece of marble. The marble has a carved depression containing water. At once the piece speaks to altering nature, only to the extent of necessity for man. It places the bench occupant on and alongside nature and implies the occupant will be merged with nature as well. Johnson does not limit herself just to found natural objects. She achieves her contrast by using bronze, cement, and stone. As in the piece, *Wall Piece*, her use of bronze supports for the shelf-like sandstone adds the contrast in color and form to enhance the undulating surface. Direct and determined color, texture, weight, and form derive from a process of living with the materials until they "speak" to Rebecca Johnson.

silicone, and the addition of wire, repetitively placed tacks, and other carefully constructed surface embellishments, each piece in the *Persona* installation takes on individual characteristics reminiscent of changes in personality or mood. Bergner establishes a dialogue between the form and the surface. At times the dialogue is confrontational and threatening. The juxtaposition of beautiful sensual surfaces with painfully sharpened pointed tacks lends tactile excitement to the work while also implying the role of man within the natural environment. These forced relationships are also felt by the viewer in *Reflecting Pool*, a wall mounted piece of polished black hydrocal, concave in shape. Here, the depressed center is coated with black silicone, oily to the eye, and embedded with meticulously placed tacks. Other works by Lanny Bergner incorporate earth residuals such as slag, coal, and stone, while also combining manmade translucent materials such as screen, monofilament, fish hooks, pins, and silicone.

Bergner's assimilation with his materials allows the works to flow from form to form and from heavy to light through the balance of the overall body of work in this exhibition. Bergner's works signify the conflict between man and nature, and his materials point to the conflict between tactile repulsion and intrigue.

Rebecca Johnson, on the other hand, has an intimate relationship of sharing with nature. Nature gives Rebecca the materials and she, in return, alters the materials in a strong but quiet presentation of her work. While visiting areas around the Philadelphia vicinity she collects natural materials to be used in her sculpture: logs, stones, branches, nests. During her search she absorbs information about the locations, observing her interaction with nature as she travels. Her pieces culminate in her impressions of the forms as they relate to the environment. Woodcarving in a style all her own, she alters the shape without denying the origin

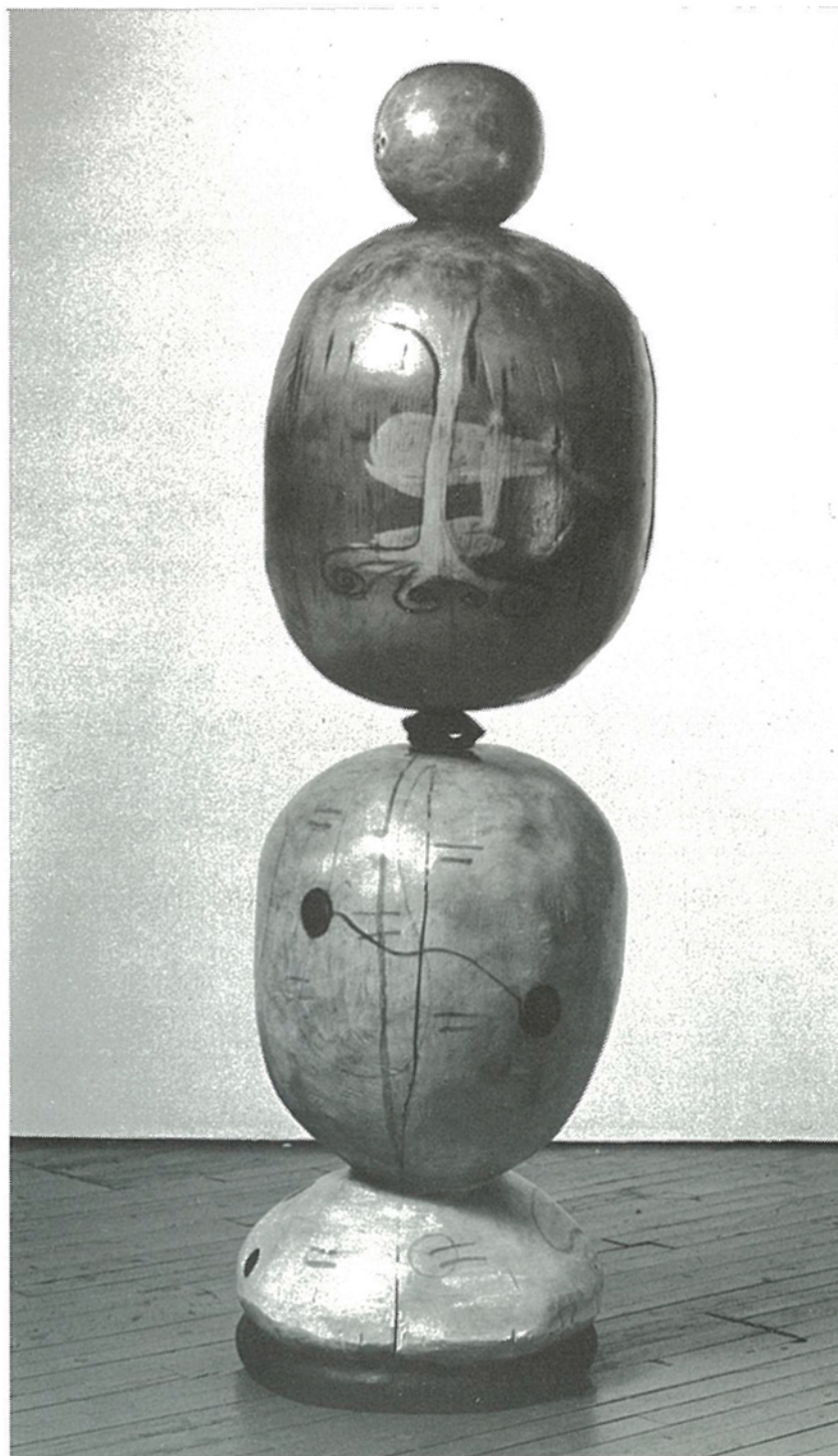


Photo: Joan Broderick. Courtesy Larry Becker, Philadelphia  
***Places Between Places***