The Object Transformed
Three Artists from Chicago
David Kargl
Dan Mills
Elizabeth Newman

MCAD Gallery
August 24-September 24, 1987

Minneapolis College of Art and Design

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David Kargl

Born 1955, Chicago, Illinois

Education
1979
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1979
A Show of Enthusiasm: Four Painters, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois
1986
Group Show, Fort Apache Gallery, Chicago
Inaugural Group Show, Bates Gallery, Chicago
The RED DOT Show, Bates Gallery, Chicago
1987
Small Paintings Exhibition, Western Illinois University Art Gallery, Macomb
Double Readings, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago

Robby Tag 1985
mixed media
12½" x 2"

Purse and Bone 1985
mixed media
33" x 40" x 1"

Shelf Life 1986
mixed media
23" x 48" x 38½"

Picture Window 1986
mixed media
50" x 58"

Wind 1986
mixed media
38" x 36"

Redick (Newton’s Piss) 1987
mixed media
17" x 20"

Fashion Iconos 1987
mixed media
48" x 50" x 3"
Dan Mills

Born 1956, Waterloo, New York

Education
1978
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, BFA
1981
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, MFA

Selected Exhibitions
1978
41st Annual Exhibition, Artists of Upstate New York, Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica, New York
1981
Converse/Transect, ISIS Gallery, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
Dan Mills/Gail Shuker, MoMing Gallery, Chicago
1983
One, One, One + One, Merwin Gallery, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington
The Additive Process, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago
1984
Juried Drawing Show, MoMing Gallery, Chicago
1985
What’s Love Got to Do with It?, ARC Gallery, Chicago
UNscen, ARC Gallery, Chicago
1986
61st Annual Rockford and Vicinity Exhibition, Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, Illinois
Dan Mills/Relief Sculptures, Prairie State College, Chicago Heights, Illinois
Outdoor Installations, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago
1987
Extended Boundaries, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, Illinois
Sculpture: Structures on the Wall, N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago
The House Show, Missouri Gallery, Chicago

Urban Building Facade #2  1986-87
found wood and nails, acrylic

F. Arms (a) 1984-85
found wood and nails, acrylic
24" x 12" x 3"

F. Arms (f) 1984-85
found wood and nails, acrylic

Above/After 1984
found wood and nails
25" x 35" x 8"/9"

Eye Beam 1985-86
found wood and nails, acrylic
23" x 22" x 5/16"

Eye Beam (Chip Off the Old Block) 1986
found wood and metal, acrylic
31/2" x 21/2" x 7/8"

Eye Beam (The Old Block) 1986-87
found wood and nails, acrylic
10" x 46" x 6"

Cathedral 1984-86
found wood and metal, acrylic
33" x 43" x 12/5"

Pep House 1986
found wood and nails, acrylic
37" x 56" x 4"
Elizabeth Newman

Born 1952, Grand Haven, Michigan

Education
1978
Michigan State University, East Lansing,
BFA
1983
School of the Art Institute of Chicago,
Illinois, MFA

Selected Exhibitions
1984
Elizabeth Newman/ Frances Rolson, School of
the Art Institute of Chicago, Superior Street
Gallery, Chicago
1985
Drawings: Chicago and Vicinity Show, Art
Institute of Chicago, Illinois
New Artists/New Work, Marianne Deson
Gallery, Chicago
Elizabeth Newman: Sculpture, Sangamon State
University, Springfield, Illinois
1986
Fetish Art: Obsessive Expressions, Rockford Art
Museum, Rockford, Illinois
A New Generation from SAIC, Museum of
Contemporary Art, Chicago
Artist/Source, Gallery 200, Northern Illinois
University, DeKalb (Traveling Exhibition)
Elizabeth Newman/Mary Ahrendt, Marianne
Deson Gallery, Chicago
Elizabeth Newman: Drawings/Sculpture Tyler
Gallery, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
1987
Group Show, Marianne Deson Gallery,
Chicago
Group Show, Ruth Braunstein Gallery, San
Francisco

Untitled (Double Banners) 1984
mixed media construction

Untitled 1987
mixed media installation

Get a Hunkin', Bai & Wu
Never Must to Be 1986
mixed media collage drawing
on tar paper
54" x 40"

Untitled (Composite #1) 1986
mixed media drawing on tar paper
54½" x 60"
Proud Objects

The unorthodox materials and mundane objects that comprise the artworks in this MCAD Gallery exhibition have a public and private history: scavenged from the streets and alleys of Chicago; found in demolished urban buildings and along the rural countryside; and collected from family attics and cellars. The finders/keepers/recreators of these familiar things are three artists from Chicago: David Kargl, Dan Mills and Elizabeth Newman. These artists have a keen sensitivity to the expressive and transcendent possibilities of objects. They combine, alter, manipulate and ultimately endow the once-common objects with a curious evocative power.

Suspended from a totemic assemblage of birdhouses and I beams, rusty wires dangle in space like a wind blown branch or an elegant line drawing. A catcher’s mitt and rubber ball encased like a trophy within a glass table have a will of their own, ready to snap from their contraption and do mischief in the gallery. Two leathery, turtle-like shells or shields are affixed to a pair of small crutches—partners in a statement of poignant passage. These reincarnated objects, and so many more here assembled, beguile and seduce us. They wear their history proudly.

For the past six months, hundreds of people have walked by David Kargl’s Outdoors Scene, an artwork that hangs outside the artist’s studio and is barely discernable amidst the visual cacophony of Chicago’s Milwaukee Avenue. Comprised of a geometric wedge of tree bark and a smashed oil can attached to a long vertical 8’x2’ plank of wood, the piece becomes a street icon—a symbolic slice of life co-mingling with the neighborhood’s plethora of signs, street vendors and ethnic color.

A folk like painting by an unknown artist was an abandoned expression until Kargl discovered it and resurrected it in the work, Picture Window. In this wall relief, the subtle earth tones—old plywood yellow, blanched white, murky blues and greys—of the panels that surround the found painting evoke an Old Masterish quality, while the collage elements bear modernism’s stamp. But this little naive scene carries the intrigue; finally enframed, it has acquired a stature and presence, and thus honors its unknown maker.

Kargl draws heavily upon urban refuse and industrial leftovers. His scavenged junk communicates “the castaway, throwaway elements, the glut of useless stuff put out in our society.” Old wood, piping, cans, glass and numerous other found objects are subjected to careful conceptualization and intuitive, improvisational groupings. A formally simple and beautiful example is Purse and Bone, which consists of two elemental objects floating on a warped grey piece of cast-off wood. The shapes emphasize texture, rough and smooth, and their identities play with our perception (the small alligator purse is real and the “bone” is actually an old wooden shoemaker’s tool) and allude to the myths of role and gender. Such cryptic poetry is characteristic of all Kargl’s intelligent and ingenious assembles of altered objects.
Using weathered wood, building slats, tall I beams, ornamental mouldings, rusty spikes and nails, crusty twisted wires and a palette of rich purples, reds, yellows, blues and oranges, Dan Mills seeks to metaphorically portray the common ground and universal histories embedded in urban and rural architecture. A recurrent motif is the house, and Mills uses this imagery to express the secrets, memories and stories left behind in houses by generations of families. In Story House, the repetition of various geometric forms resembling windows, doors and floors suggests the layered remnants of families. The façades of the evocative wall reliefs Pip House and Easter House assume personas, their abstract faces bear windows as "eyes." A sense of contradiction and integrity informs Mills’ architectural references and elements. He uses things from the urban environment to recreate assemblages that have a strong rural feel, and he respects the natural aged, weathered state of his chosen materials. For example, materials for his recent series, Urban Building Facades, were taken from turn-of-the-century flats in Chicago’s "near northwest side." These works were part of a specific public art project that, upon completion, was installed on the second-floor facade of one of the flats: a provocative union of past/present, interior/exterior. Mills allowed weather to touch his Facades: sun bleached the painterly glazing and rust bled throughout, creating new brushmarks. Seen here in a pristine gallery setting, the wall reliefs are spirited and serene panoramas, dusky blue slats inviting us to meditate on form and experience, perhaps an atmospheric sky.

Mills grounds his work in humble, even ancient life. The bolted fence posts attached to a small wooden ironing board in Cathedral form the shape of the lofty structure alluded in the title. The fence posts, once buried in the ground, now point upwards as noble pinnacles. And in Roundhouse, barbed wires and wooden spikes are splayed in a circle, evoking ritualistic imagery: a primitive sign on the wall; an object of devotion; an ancient weather dial.

Crickets chirp and plant life grows in Elizabeth Newman’s installation for the MCAD Gallery. Approaching this space, we enter a microcosmical realm of small and complex objects—or is this a laboratory where items have been placed, ordered and classified according to some strange, yet beautiful logic? A low shelf contains the “Evolution of Forms”: wire baskets and wooden crates reveal the progressive transformation from black turds to softly-hued eggs. Countless objects are arranged on four glass shelves: from cuttlefish bones, dentist teeth molds, toy telephone wires to a cow weaner mask. Others are joined in improbable juxtapositions: a glass tube with alpaca hair is bound to a tin funnel and thirty-six pink rubber balls rest in a cardboard egg slab. And there are more bizarre hybrids occupying this fantastical place: wall-mounted and freestanding objects, such as Hairy Titty Bookends and a laundry hamper filled with “ancient rocks.”

Newman’s objects evoke innumerable associations. Often encased in scientific/medical specimen boxes, jars and vials, the objects engender an acute sense of life cycles: embryonic states, mature growth and mortality. Her startling combinations of organic and metallic materials also recall childhood games, but in Newman’s hands, it is a surreal mischief that predominates: a tether ball sports spiky latex hairs; an “industrial strength” rubber jump rope is trapped in a steel mount; the membranous net of a basketball hoop sags like some primitive skin bag. Numerous items in Newman’s repertoire owe their origin and significance to her past: a grandfather’s cricket box, grass shears or a clawed apple picker. And her use of insects, dirt, plants, stones, seeds, pods and earthy colors is rooted in her past environs, the woods and water of rural Michigan. She alters objects in an inventive, visceral manner. Forms are coated with latex, threaded with fibers, etched with pictographic images, bound with cloth, and granted new identities in the process. A wrapped cone sits quietly on the floor and poses a range of associations, from a manufactured weapon to an acorn.

We are continually drawn back to Newman’s wondrously imaginative place, a transformed gallery space that is powerfully seductive and mysterious.

These three artists approach the object in a highly individualistic manner, yet as this exhibition demonstrates, there is an overwhelming sense of common spirits, of layered colors, surfaces and associations. Kargl, Mills and Newman’s distinctive assemblages and constructions draw us in intellectually and emotionally and they offer a glimpse of what’s beneath the ordinainess of things: a magical and noble life.

Julie Yanson
Director, MCAD Gallery