THE ADDITIVE PROCESS

Hyde Park Art Center
1701 E. 53rd St., 312/324-5520

The title of this exhibition of the work of five Chicago artists is The Additive Process. However, the fact that these particular works were chosen because they incorporate layers of material and process is of secondary importance. Of primary importance is the fact that all of these works are visually and intellectually involving. They are works that thoroughly explore the artist's concepts while allowing for full viewer interpretation.

Some of the female torso sculpture pieces of Ruth Azuss Migdal hang on the wall, others recline or stand supported by marble pedestals. The female forms are created from high-fired clay in layers of terra cotta colors, darkened with oxides. These are both Migdal's earth goddesses and creatures formed by primordial seas—fragile folds of clay seemingly balanced on an edge of petrified flesh.

Some of the hourglass earthenware figures reflect the idea of Victorian form: the cinched waist, buxom bust, and full hips that seem anachronistic in this contemporary use of material. Perhaps they are a comment on antiquated views of women that still prevail. However, the best pieces are those of less obvious form: less torso definition and more dependence on line upon line, as in Rectifying Goddess No. 19, or the top heavy and intertwined, multiple breasted Goddess of Madness, with its legless form balanced precariously on a point at mid-thigh.

The works of Dan Mills and Cameron Zebrun are wall-hung, constructed primarily of pieces of wood, and built around home/shelter/building concepts. Although the similarities of the works of these two artists seem to invite comparison, their location in the same gallery space reveals the contrasting intentions of the artists.

Mills' works concentrate on the concept of house/building as symbol and space. Whether flat or projecting off of the wall, these flat-wood structures speak of the house as part of the personal American identity. Empty or rose-colored window "eyes" look out at the world through rigid or ambiguous architecture, as in Ambigibldg. The home/space constructed Anasazi/Indian style puts the visitor at a disadvantage (doorways you must stoop to enter, as in Pselter I).

In contrast, Cameron's two-dimensional "buildings" present the exterior rather than interior; site and environment are enmeshed with the paint and wood of these representational structures, and small bits of patterned cloth stand for human elements. These pieces are photographic: shadows and color become part of form and meaning. Shade is exterior wall in the shadows of an afternoon sun that colors or bleaches existing values of wood and paint. The hot summer sun on the wall in Noon reveals weathered remnants of previous coats of paint or layers of posters, patterns, or people who previously existed in this place.

The relief works of Alice Shaddle and Gail Skudera have only the fact of being wall-hung in common. Shaddle creates paper-tapestries and Skudera creates textile-paintings. Shaddle weaves, layers, and places "thousands" of paper pieces together, borrowing from paper punches, textile patterns, and wallpaper books to produce exquisite "frescoes" or Byzantine paper-paintings. In March, the artist seems to superimpose a color aerial view of an overgrown English garden with a riot of multicolored tulips that surround a burst of daffodils: the earth dressed in its Easter finery. Wall is the turquoise watery floor of an Italian mosaic fountain, swirled with winter-dried and time-patinized leaves, as might be seen by looking down into the pool from just above waterline. Tree of Life is the closest to a tapestry effect, weaves paper and drawings of a human face with animals and flowers through delicate weathered and entwined branches of an elusive tree. Watercolor and paper are frescoed and faded into a semblance of aged fragility.

Skudera's works, two-dimensional and relief forms, rely on the dovetail as concept: the ambiguity of that cabinetmaker's technique for joining two pieces of wood without glue or nail, combined with the feathered rudder of the bird of peace. Form and pattern and material are one in these works, and the shadows cast by ambient gallery light become an integral part of each relief piece. While cloth triangles project off the flat plane of the "canvas," shadows from these spill over the frame edges and extend the "tails" into another space. Painted values of color that reflect the dimensional dovetails take on new tones, shapes and planes within the newly cast shadows. Skudera's pieces, like all of the works in this show, form patterns incorporated with created levels of space that reflect life's moments and become transformed when seen in different light or when interpreted with a different eye.

Price range: $160 to $5,500.

BETHE ALLISON