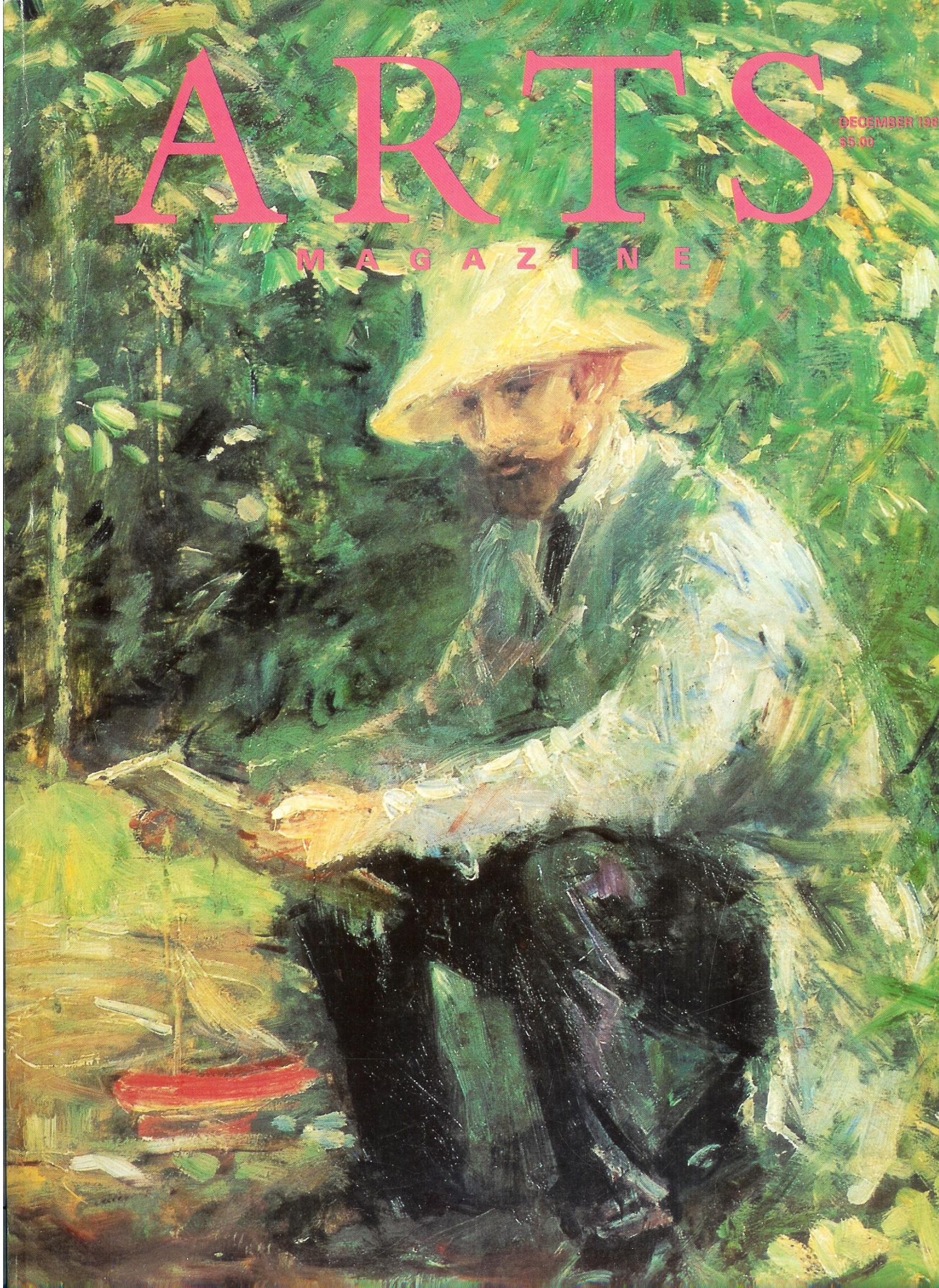


ARTS

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M A G A Z I N E



the cube in defeat; the other arises evilly, with insubstantial, flame-like red arms outstretched in triumph. There is a strong sense here that the darker side of one individual's nature has definitively asserted itself.

Hafftk's work is equally compelling when he depicts only one figure. The subject of *Man Meditating*, for instance, sits in the lotus position, but his eyes are wide open, almost in alarm. This is anything but an image of a man at peace with his thoughts. And in *White Hole* a figure with a large whitish hole through his genitals stares dazedly ahead. Spatters of reddish paint fly from one side of his body, suggesting some grisly, violent injury.

Obviously, there is nothing reassuring or comforting about Hafftk's vampiric creatures or the nightmarish netherworld they inhabit. But we cannot help but be fascinated, even charmed, by this hell, and we want to wander through it and linger in rather perverse appreciation of its terrors. (DiLaurenti, *September 23-October 31*)

JOSHUA STERN

Joshua Stern's twin shows, which ran concurrently at Greathouse and at Craig Cornelius, both revealed a preoccupation with the power of advertising graphics. Stern tries to deal with some interesting issues—advertising's scary ability to sell us just about anything and everything, for example, and the complex relationship between logo and visual imagery—but he rarely explores these concerns deeply or specifically enough to make a compelling point. Although some of his paintings, particularly at Greathouse, did have a satisfyingly chilling effect, Stern in general seems to have developed a distinctive, timely, and visually intriguing style without yet having thought of a great deal to say.

Stern, a 30-year-old, self-taught painter, sets his appropriated industrial-strength brand names (*Flowhood*, *DoAll*, and so on) against murky, cheerless, usually nonrepresentational backgrounds. This juxtaposition is surprising because the advertising to which we are accustomed is so relentlessly upbeat and clean-lined. Consequently, in the five large oils at Greathouse, Stern neatly conjures up some sort of post-cataclysmic society whose gloomy, ominous billboards reflect the disturbing tenor of the times. *Armor-*

ply shockingly yet matter-of-factly promotes “slave pallets”—cages for housing or transporting subjugated people. *Dowty*, in which a menacing propeller drips red paint, may be taken to refer to some bloodthirsty war machine. These two works could be the promising start of an Orwellian Christmas catalogue. But in the other three paintings, we are simply given too little information about the products or their manufacturers to derive much more than a vague, if titillating, sense of industry trying to adapt to a world gone horribly wrong.

The smaller-scale encaustic paintings at Craig Cornelius were even more problematic, for the most part. These works purport, according to the Greathouse press release, to investigate “the visual poetry or pun implicit in the language aspects of the logo.” In one work, for example, the word *Pflow* is superimposed on a sea of blue-green waves, suggesting some sort of watery associations. But more typical in its frustrating abstruseness was a painting in which the logo *Flents* appeared on a checkerboard of muddy brown and yellowish squares. If the artist has puns or poems to share, he must make an effort to let us know what they are. (Greathouse, *September 9-27*; Craig Cornelius, *September 9-October 10*)

PAST AND FUTURE MONUMENT: SIX SCULPTORS

In a world in which we are baraged by a constant stream of throwaway media messages, a growing number of artists are reaching both backward and for-

ward in time to create works that suggest a more permanent and meaningful presence. Six sculptors in this movement were represented in “Past and Future Monument,” a show in which science fiction and history, archeology and up-to-the-minute technology, blended in diverse ways.

Probably the most interesting works in the show were those containing organic references. The two sculptures of Livio Saganic, for example—*Gesture of Commonplace* and *In the Wind*—not only explore both the rough-hewn and the elegant qualities of the black slate from which they are fashioned, but the legs on which they stand seem to link them to furniture or to life-forms. In their ambiguous evocation of both the organic and the inanimate, Saganic's works quietly achieve a challenging complexity.

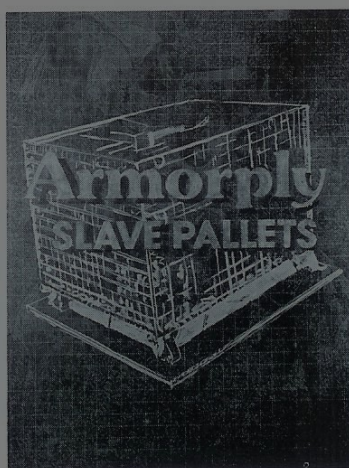
The concrete stelae of Clyde Lynds are more immediately arresting. Each of these objects looks at first glance as if it had been dug up after lying for millennia in the scorching desert. However, one quickly realizes that pinpoints of light, created by fiber-optic cables, trace slowly but constantly shifting patterns on the surface of each stele. The simple juxtaposition of the seemingly an-

cient weathered pillars, inscribed with various cryptic symbols, and the high-tech light patterns makes for an effective, if enigmatic, meeting of two disparate worlds. Furthermore, the changing and irregular configurations of light give the stelae a strangely lifelike aspect, as if some alien intelligence were at work.

A similar fusion of “Star Trek” and the Rosetta Stone was evident in the large pyramids of Theo Kamecke. The surfaces of these works are covered with computer circuit boards decorated with symbolic characters. The pyramids recall both the monoliths of ancient Egyptian and Mayan civilizations and the fanciful temples of futuristic films. But they lack the dynamic inner tension that seems needed to make them effective. A similar problem besets Houston Conwill's huge wall construction *The First Circle*, which reveals the complex structural underpinnings of something like an unearthed wheel with an outer surface that is peeling away. Although this work is an intriguing study of the process of decay, its content seems unnecessarily overwrought for the point it is trying to make.

Function, or its absence, is a concern in the relatively small-scale sculptures of Claire Lieberman. Lieberman smashes marble and glues it back together with resin to create works that appear to be fragments of Greco-Roman artifacts. Her sculptures resemble urns, but they are solid and their purpose thus becomes a matter of some speculation. The massive works of Ron Mehlman involve a related contradiction. Influenced by the more recent past, Mehlman's sculptures echo the clean lines of International Style architecture; *Blue Pearl*, for example, consists of rectilinear slabs of granite and glass in a somewhat skyscraperlike arrangement. But a fundamental principle of the International Style was functionalism, and, ironically, Mehlman's works indicate no particular practical application. Different though Lieberman's and Mehlman's sculptures may be in terms of scale, form, and inspiration, they share certain key features: both artists show off their elegant materials to fine advantage, but their works, however handsome, seem too cool, static, and assuredly self-contained to intimate that they may harbor timeless secrets. (Jayne H. Baum, *September 17-October 17*)

Joshua Stern, *Armorply*, 1986.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 60".
Courtesy Greathouse Gallery.



Ron Mehlman, *Hidden Gate*, 1987.
Greek marble and glass, 70 x 25 x 15".
Courtesy Jane H. Baum Gallery.

