

ART

Glass Sculptures That Look Like F

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

WHEN an artist radically changes his signature style, his audience is often bewildered. But a really good artist knows that he can bring his following with him. Change does not have to mean reversal of position, but further elucidation of a body of core ideas.

Livio Saganic is one of these good, canny artists. Major shifts are even more difficult for a sculptor because they might entail, as they do in his case, new materials. Mr. Saganic made his mark by sculpturing out of slate. The nine new pieces on exhibit at the Korn Gallery at Drew University have strips of plate glass as their main component.

They resemble paintings, for they are bound in aluminum frames and hung on the wall, but the surfaces are made by fusing long strips of glass. The result resembles a computer or television screen, but the title of the series is "Butcher's Window," which implies anything but the cool passivity associated with electronic media.

Mr. Saganic was born in Croatia, in what was Yugoslavia, in 1950 and now lives in New Jersey. He says that as a child he had anemia and the doctor recommended meat. He used to accompany his mother to the butcher shop in Zagreb. Lacking refrigeration, the meat was kept fresh by being sprayed with water, and these sculptures are partly an attempt to recapture the sensation of a small boy's

A show evokes the shambles of Yugoslavia.

coming down the street and seeing that dark window streaming water from the inside.

But of course butchery in what was Yugoslavia now has a wider and sickening meaning. It has nothing to do with health but with mass killing that is familiar to the whole world via television. Mr. Saganic's streamlined sculptures, flickering gray with tinges with green and white, preach nothing of this dire and horrific message. But they are all the stronger because their implacability contains the shambles of Yugoslavia encoded, as it were, at every point.

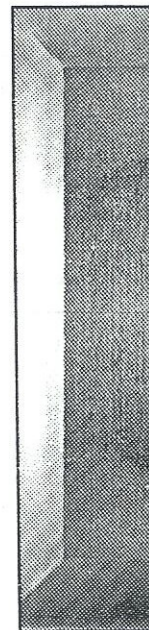
Mr. Saganic says the image of the window has always been something he has wanted to capture but never knew how to do it. In fact, the solution came about, as such solutions often do, through a happy eureka-style accident. He was using a torch on a piece of slate and kept the torch on the slate too long, and the result resembled glass. His first attempts with glass were freestanding pieces that could be walked around. He was unhappy with these because they looked the same front and back.

He had some discomfort with the idea of making wall pieces, but the frames around them, exaggerated as they are, show that he has plunged into the notion of making pictures. The series was begun in 1992 and has continued with increasingly bolder images coming through the glass.

Mr. Saganic discloses that there is an "air pocket" that separates the abstract composition drawn on the recessed back of the piece and the inch-thick glass surface. Those familiar with computer screens will especially understand how the images seen through the glass move in and out of firm definition.

The subtleties of the work are not captured in reproduction, where the frames also show up shinier than they are. But reproduction also emphasizes that in part Mr. Saganic is updating an old but transitory style, Op Art. His sculptures bear a superficial resemblance to the paintings of Richard Anuszkiewicz or Victor Vasarely and their attempts to dazzle the retina. But in person, it is the cool dispassion and the element of time that it takes to experience these quiet works that distinguishes them.

The slate sculptures that gained Mr. Saganic his reputation were an ordering of chaos. Each amorphous piece of slate was, he has written, "a small and complete landscape." But his alterations were in the nature of civilizing this landscape. Sometimes pronounced temples or monuments would appear. At other times it was a row of regular incisions not unlike the regularity of the fused glass strips in the present work.



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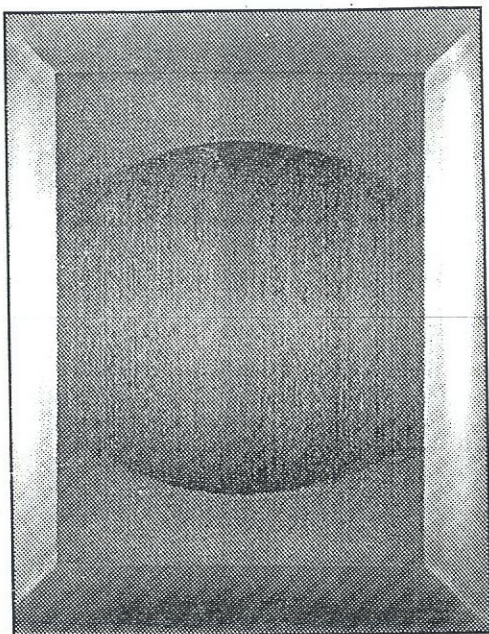
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Two works from the "Butcher's Window" series by Livio Saganic, on exhibition at Drew University.

He said in an interview in 1985 that he remembered running from the sound of a passing airplane and hiding his head among stones, so even then events in the world informed his art. But he also said, "I feel I have the responsibility to miss social urgency and to do work which is beyond personal pathos."

In the current work, Mr. Saganic more than flirts with that urgency. He grips viewers not in pathos but silently in the clutch of genuine emotion.

The coming Fine Arts Section of the New Jersey Arts Annual at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton will have a 7-foot-by-7-foot room by

Mr. Saganic that is entirely covered with a surface like the "Butcher's Window" series.

The series is at the Korn Gallery of the Brothers College building at Drew University in Madison through Friday. Hours are 12:30 to 4 P.M. Tuesday through Friday and by appointment at (201) 408-3553. ■

