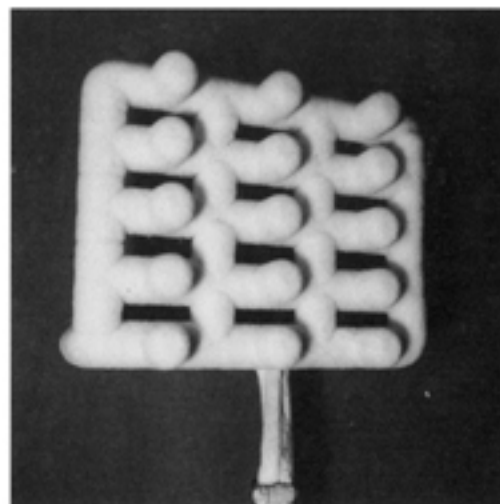




Theodore Roszak, *Night Flight*, 1958–62, steel, 96 x 120 x 58".
From "The Third Dimension."



Rachel bas-Cohain, *Frozen Grid*, 1973, copper tubing, cooling system, and atmospheric water vapor, 65 x 18 x 12".

mance, that Weiss' original hybrid has an unquenchable life of its own.

—JOHN HOWELL

"The Third Dimension," Whitney Museum of American Art; RACHEL BAS-COHAIN, A.I.R. Gallery:

"The Third Dimension: Sculpture of the New York School"

This was one of those artist-influencing shows that will probably result in an adaptive, Lamarckian revival of Abstract Expressionist sculpture. At the same time, its delicious aroma of rightness derived in part from a highly developed olfactory capacity to sniff what's in the air: as organizer Lisa Phillips implied by including in the catalogue photographs of works by Mel Kendrick, Nancy Graves, and Bryan Hunt, some return to an abstract but antiminimal sculpture has already begun. Until this show, however, when one looked around for what hadn't been curatorially anchored into place this chunk of the past floated loose. Seymour Lipton, Ibram Lassaw, Theodore Roszak, and Herbert Ferber represented one of the few schools remaining to be retrieved from limbo. It was inevitable that somebody would do this show, then, but the glory rightly belongs to Phillips since she coorganized a survey of the same subject at the Whitney Downtown in 1979, long before this moment of historical imperative.

Although the opportunity to see pieces so long out of the public eye would alone make one grateful for this exhibition, its elements were intelligently orchestrated to maximize effect—even down to the subtle matching of incidental details with the period, from the flecked walls to the flesh-pink and aqua tones of the catalogue

cover. As one moved deeper into the U-shaped set of five rooms the work arguably got correspondingly more inward, the rooms more cloistered, until at the most interior or deepest point of the U, the third and fourth rooms in the sequence, the walls had darkened and the floors been padded with purple plush. Among other works in the third room were Louise Nevelson's *Tender Being*, 1956, and *Black Majesty*, 1955, and Louise Bourgeois' *One and Others*, 1955, and *Mortise*, 1950. Through other works in this room the installation argued for an equation of the figural and the introspective that also held for the fourth room, which was full of anthropomorphic totems as well—including David Smith's *Tanktotem IV*, 1953, and Richard Stankiewicz's *Kabuki Dancer*, 1956. Despite their similarity, the two rooms disagreed over the terms of human existence. The lone columnar sculptures of room four embraced an existentialist isolation, though one not necessarily poised on the brink. Their humor allied them less to anxiety than to the absurd. The sculptures of room three, on the other hand, were groupings or were otherwise embedded in social context, like Gabriel Kohn's tacklike "presence" on a chair. (One of the few disappointments was that more components of Nevelson's *The Forest* environment, 1957, could not be included; the meaning of a stele like *Tender Being* is syntactical.) Bourgeois' *Mortise* virtually demonstrates "fitting in"—it is a stack of wooden blocks secured with mortise and tenon in the mutuality of guest and host or prisoner and stock. Centered in the room, a symbol of the general articulation, was David Hare's *The Dinner Table*, 1950, its literally highly strung construction a

reflection of the theme of the nightmare web of social relations.

With room five, which seemed to concentrate on engineering feats, we were abruptly in the bright, bare, spacious realm, on the polished parquet floor, of the rational. Moreover, John Chamberlain's *Johnnybird*, 1959, George Sugarman's *Yellow Top*, 1960, and Mark di Suvero's *Che Faro Senza Eurydice*, 1959, brought us also into the light of the relative present, less tenebrous because not yet forgotten. Works stretched, balanced, squashed, unfolded, and limbered up; one would say they disported acrobatically but for the fact that they were emphatically not humanly referred. They shared the ambitions of suspension bridges to extend horizontally and vertically, without obvious support, through a system of tensile checks and balances—in fact, Sugarman's *Six Forms in Pine*, 1959, spans two long separated pedestals. This mood matched that of the first room, in which the constructions were overwhelmingly more linear but still were obsessed with structural engineering. Wire and string dominated; Lassaw's and Ferber's roofed but open and gridded compositions were typical. Thus whether one took the righthand tip of the U on entering the exhibition or the left, as I did, the procession through the rooms provided similar experiences.

It was the second room, however, that was most riveting. Seen as a prologue to the figural works further on, this was a last outpost before entering the brooding heart of darkness; if one took the rooms in the reverse order, it was a postcatastrophic return to prehistory. In any case, this aviary of "apocalyptic birds" was a small essay in itself. It was where the real

rediscoveries were concentrated—Roszak, Lipton, and Ferber—and their impact partly resulted from their high contrast with the rest of the show, thanks to their combination of imagistic suggestiveness and relative unfamiliarity. Other recovered artists who were emphasized elsewhere in the installation—Lassaw, for example, or even Ferber on occasion—seemed less surprising because their small model environments were reminiscent of the glut of such architectural presentations both during the Bauhaus and in the 70s. Another factor in the freshness of Roszak, Lipton, and the Ferber work in the second room was the incidence of interior event, of mini episode located physically within the maxi episode of the sculpture, a development of Henry Moore's "pregnant" biomorphisms. This nesting, subsequently dropped from sculptors' vocabulary, along with the works' extreme tactility of surface and strongly metaphoric associations, is both forgotten enough and close enough to contemporary interests to provide practical inspiration.

RACHEL BAS-COHAIN

"Let us inquire, to what end is nature?" Not only might Rachel bas-Cohain (1937–1982) have put Ralph Waldo Emerson's question to herself, but she must have shared Emerson's conception of the fluid character of nature, of energy, their binding unity the confluence of forces. Hence her continuance of the kinetic tradition, particularly that part of the tradition less concerned with the machine than with the phenomena it generates. Liliane Lijn's *Liquid Reflections*, 1966–67, in which drops of moisture trapped under a clear turntable move in apparently inex-

plicable ways, is not so different from bas-Cohain's bubbles rising mysteriously in a cylinder (*Saucer Bubble Gently Rising*, 1970), or from the appearing and disappearing whirlpools of *Study No. 1 for Grand Vortices*, 1971. The subject matter in both cases is an energy and movement almost weightless, bodiless, intangible.

Like Emerson, bas-Cohain was always searching for an ultimate meaning in the physical, and for her as for him, the intensity of the search rendered nature transparent. Looking for the inner core, she found an air pocket. And the hollow center of the whirlpools and bubbles is matched by the insubstantiality of frost and dew—mere breath, transpiration—in pieces such as *Frozen Grid*, 1973, a grid of ice-covered refrigeration pipes, and *Dew Point*, 1973, a gathering of atmospheric moisture on a copper plate. Later, when bas-Cohain shifted to grappling with more tangible form, the commitment to weightlessness and hollowness did not abate. *Sefah*, 1978, casts of rocks from celastic wrappings, is a series of husks or shells. Then there is the lightness and transparency of the last sculptures, boxed still life arrangements constructed of gossamerlike organza hung from strings, and still, in their debt to Alexander Calder, part of the kinetic story.

However, there was decidedly a shift—from science to esthetics, from observer to participant, from absolutist to relativist. The center eluding her in the objective world, bas-Cohain turned to the subjective. Again like Emerson, she seems eventually to have wondered whether "Nature enjoy a substantial existence without or is only the apocalypse of the mind." As Sarah McFadden notes in her intelligent essay for this show, bas-Cohain's growing distrust of language and perception created an almost post-Modern fragmentation. As a descendant of the 19th-century naturalist, she needed not only to observe but also to record. Marks made by tea stains, sculptures out of cigarette papers—as bas-Cohain begins to turn inward the records refer obliquely to the quotidian private life, and they are used to rebel against the tyranny of the grid, against the "scientific" character of the kinetic pieces. By 1973 the record becomes the phenomenon investigated. In the "Stasis" series, 1973, the record performs tricks, reshapes itself: *Selections from the Copy Book Alphabet* are specimens of Palmer writing stretched and warped as if seen through a fish-eye lens. From warped record to biased recorder is a short step,

and at this point bas-Cohain seems close to accepting the unreliability inherent in the act of recording. In *Reviews*, 1974–76, however, she is still demanding absolute literal fidelity to a knowable reality. This was a collaborative effort in which artists attempted to reconstruct an artwork from the information gleaned in reviews of it.

It's difficult to prove a clear progression from one attitude to another, since elements of both occur early on. But it is hard to shake the feeling that bas-Cohain reached a turning point with the distortions of the "Stasis" series. Before, she hid the mechanisms in her kinetic pieces, denying herself as prime mover. After came the landscape projects in which, as though still looking for the core, she penetrated hills with pipes and cement rods, and works where she manipulated the view (tying down bushes, hanging a scrim with holes to look through). And in 1981 she began the highly controlled still life objects. Partly the move to objecthood was a function of the time, partly it may have been bas-Cohain's acceptance of herself as a causative agent not completely unlike those whose authoritarian power she resented. The paradox is that the silk-organza constructions, their strings and boxes suggesting puppet theaters, allude to both control and unreliability, while the more solid, controlled entities, the cups and vessels which recall Giorgio Morandi's, are ghostly, vacated. They seem to illustrate the transcendental knowledge that is beyond the limits of experience, independent of the material universe. But just as possibly they were for bas-Cohain simply empty again.

—JEANNE SILVERTHORNE

MARK RAPPAPORT, Collective for Living Cinema:

During the '70s Mark Rappaport directed a number of films that can be seen as comedic homages to misinformation, missions impossible, and mistaken identities. Though varying in narrative specificity and construction, these films seem to coalesce into a continuous stream of visual and verbal gambits which seem intent not on telling us something but on telling us everything and nothing. Eluding characterological particulars and conventional closure, they stick together pieces of stories and act like thesauri of circumstances—crazy quilts of mismatched paragraphs strewn amid the lives of their characters, like the Scrabble set that ate New York. This odd kind of storytelling plays with the sanctity

usually granted verisimilitude, and, not unlike "real life," turns the "truth" into daydreams and "lies" into anthems.

In *The Scenic Route*, 1978, one character comments to another "I wouldn't even tell you a lie, much less the truth," and leads us on a wild-goose chase through ill-fated relationships, postcard vistas, and baroque tableaux. Like all of Rappaport's films, *The Scenic Route's* meandering exposition renders a conventional plot summary useless, but suffice it to say that duos disperse into triangulations and conspiracies are hatched and crushed in one fell swoop. In *Casual Relations*, 1973, a dozen or so characters get their stories told via a kind of serial vignetting which pictures them in situations ranging from bad drug trips to watching TV all day to getting kicks viewing old newsreels of catastrophes. This string of portraiture allows Rappaport to indulge his affection for both anecdotal accountings and deadpan disclosures. Druggies tumble to the floor repeatedly as Little Eva belts out "Do the Locomotion," a man and a woman give varying descriptions of a crime, a film-within-a-film segment shows us a parody of a vampire flick, and a porno model's foot snuggles on a sofa like a paw or a hoof sheathed in sultry mesh stockings. In *Blue Streak*, 1970, we see a roomful of naked people; as they chatter and gesture a voice-over expels a litany of "dirty words." This interior view replete with "blue streak" is alternated with color shots of a landscape over which female and male voices read a porno text. But in a smart reversal, the female voice recites the male point of view while the man describes the woman's experience. This gender shift connects with the conflicting crime reportage in *Casual Relations* and foregrounds Rappaport's interests in sexual ambivalence and placeless points of view.

Impostors, 1979, comes closest to conventional narrative while still keeping its distance. Rappaport's repertoire of variable backdrops, framed images, and theatrical maneuvers attains a new refinement here, allowing him to indulge the fluencies of artifice while still retaining his obvious affinity for circuitous speech-writing and parodic counterpoint. Ostensibly about two twins named Mikey and Chuckie who are searching for an Egyptian treasure, it also involves the assistant in their magic act, Tina, and the man who is obsessed with her. But the story, of course, soon diffuses into a bunch of mixed messages, cul-de-sacs, and soap operatics.

Rappaport's linguistic ease is in high gear in *Impostors*, but it makes its pres-

ence clearly known in all the films included in this retrospective. Welcomed in Europe for their intelligence and eccentricities, they have had a tougher time in America, where it is notoriously difficult to operate in the terrain between conventional studio product and artisanal film work. In spite of this Rappaport continues to make films that join the "creative" dispensations granted art-world production with the accessibility of the theatrical film.

—BARBARA KRUGER

MAN RAY, Zabriskie Gallery; MEL KENDRICK, John Weber Gallery:

MAN RAY

The objects assembled here, some originals and some replicas, ranged in date from 1928 to 1973. Most of them are from the '50s on, and interestingly present Man Ray not simply as a classical Modernist but as a somewhat contemporary artist. A protosemiotician of art, Ray, along with Marcel Duchamp and René Magritte, devised the critical modes of art objecthood, creating objects that avoid categories through a multileveled visual and verbal punning which splits apart realms of signification that are commonsensically understood as together, and conjoins those commonly apart. The catalogue reprints Rosalind Krauss' fine essay from the catalogue raisonné by Philippe Sers, along with an interesting note by John Tancock on replicas and editions.

That many of these works exist today only as replicas or photographic images is consonant with Krauss' interesting statement that Man Ray was an early explorer of the order of simulacra. This is one reason why his work is so particularly interesting right now. Another is the incredible poetry of objects such as *Main Ray*, 1971, a hand reaching up from a desk-top pedestal and holding a ball (the title suggesting Man Ray, hand ray, and main ray, a term that Krauss discusses), or the violin fragment *Emak Bakia*, 1970. Uniqueness of conception interpenetrates the stream of simulacra, giving the oeuvre both an uncanny presentness to our moment and a remarkable combination of complexity and freedom.

MEL KENDRICK

Mel Kendrick's new sculptures remind one so inevitably of early Picasso and Brancusi and of the African art that influenced those artists that they could almost be called quotational. The works are living-room size—smaller than a human