

## A VIEW FROM BALTIMORE TO WASHINGTON

Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County  
Baltimore, Maryland  
April 14 - May 14

Curator Osvaldo Mesa has culled artists from the Baltimore-Washington area to put together a personal yet resonant exhibition of six installations for this year's "A View from Baltimore to Washington." The artists share with the audience fragments of their own histories and their perspectives on their place in the world. Often employing natural materials, these explorations suggesting the negotiation of individual identity in a broader context of life cycles are not self-absorbed.

Severed loblolly pine branches dangle hazily from the ceiling above a perfect circle of cracked eggshells in Howard and Mary McCoy's *Above and Below*. These beautifully simple forms retain a pri-



Stephen Lee, *Bridge*, installation view, mixed media, 1994  
(photo: Tim Ford).

mordial eloquence, conjuring up images of mystical druid rituals. The circle of delicate discarded eggshells—once the container of birth—captures the duality of the transient but never-ending cycle of life.

Unlike the McCoy's graceful scene, E.H. Sorrells-Adewale's *With These Hands I Reclaim and Continue* is an explosion of fanciful forms and bright colors. Of the many components in the work, Sorrells-Adewale's manipulation of wood is most compelling. The artist abrades the surface of the branches by grinding in dirt and rich pigments and embedding it with cowrie shells and shards of mirror. In one corner, the branches are smoothly contorted into a circle recalling Martin Puryear's elegant work. More shells, decorated masks, beads, and feathers scattered around the installation speak of African tradition and ritual. Hovering paint-soaked gloves, suggesting the presence of an unearthly power, orchestrate the disparate elements with vibrant colored jump ropes. This fantastical—and somewhat unfocused—scene portrays connections between this life and a spiritual world of ancestors and traditions.

The connections in Lee's surreal but rather flat *Bridge* are not spiritual but generational. Unanimated figures of a mother in a rocking chair and a father in a suit are created from straw and surrounded by an odd amalgam of household objects. In this unemotional and obtuse homage to parents, the mother's straw arm forms a bridge to the distant father's stuffed shoulder. Red construction paper flowers that are safety-pinned to his suit allude to the human desire to freeze fleeting moments in time. However, the presence of a

cut-off ponytail in the woman's lap pointedly documents the end of youth.

Gillian Brown's untitled piece from 1992 is another domestic scene that plays with perception. The viewer must piece together a fragmented painted image with real three-dimensional objects to create the full scene of a young girl sitting at a table in a playroom. Mimicking the wonder of childhood discovery, the viewer participates in the creation of the work and becomes conscious of the act of looking. Unlike the other installations, Brown does not work with relics of intimate significance. Also the absence of organic materials makes the work feel too slick. The clever manipulation of space removes any passion or personal involvement of the artist.

On the other hand, Izumi Ueda and Luis Flores weave haunting narratives about memory and history through stunning installations of carefully chosen objects. Flores' consistently engrossing work does not falter here in *Centinalas/Sentinelas*. A lock of hair neatly preserved in a small envelope is collaged with abstract prints of palm leaves and a photo of a son and father at a market in Puerto Rico. This photo, which carries deep personal associations for Flores, is often recycled in his works. Placed at the center is a large old (or artificially aged) photograph of a young man. Superimposed images of an older man imply a father-son relationship or the journey of a young man into maturity. Paper bags arranged around the collage are the containers of objects, secrets, or memories gathered in preparation for a sojourn. In the foreground, dried palms bound with red ribbon, gourds, and a section of tree trunk are placed in a small house-like structure adorned with a ladder leading upwards into the air. Flores gathers meaningful found objects to create a sense of home that suggests fragmentation and constant motion yet carries traditions of the past into the future.

Like Flores' work, Izumi Ueda's beautiful light-filled space also contains old photographs that draw history into the intimate installation *Arms*. Three revered portraits of Asian women counteract the stereotypes of "the Orient" embodied in a kimono made from a meticulous arrangement of used tea bags. The repetition of the tea bags is echoed by the uniformly placed stains of brownish fluid dripped down the walls, which are eerily suggestive of executions. Diagrams of acupuncture points are arranged in orderly piles on the floor next to pages of Asian text running along the baseboard. A white gauzy canopy cascades from the ceiling casting an ethereal aura over the space. At the same time it conjures up uncomfortable medical associations. Ueda poignantly comments on the jarring unity of the physical and the spiritual realms in human life.

Osvaldo Mesa, himself an installation artist, has sensitively curated these artists' diverse and complex views. Each artist interprets her/his particular life experiences within a larger continuum, making this an extraordinarily rich and affecting exhibition.

Katherine Carl, Baltimore, Maryland