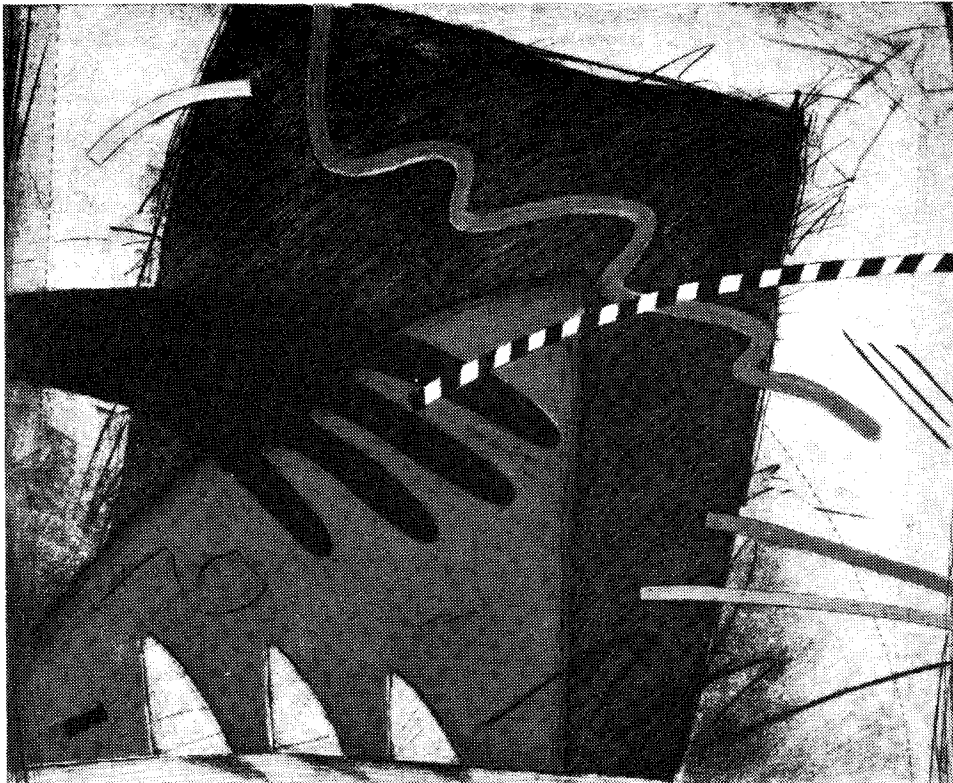


SANTA FE



(Photo by Robert Reck.)

Jane Abrams, *Snare for Wild Horns*.

Orifice and Artifice

A newcomer to Santa Fe's art exhibitions scene, St. John's College Art Gallery offered its second strong contribution in February with a month-long showing of prints and drawings by Jane Abrams and Carl Johansen.

Twenty works by Abrams comprised the first comprehensive Santa Fe exhibit by this seasoned artist and teacher whose mastery of the intaglio print has made her a major asset of UNM's printmaking department. The intelligent exhibition elucidated the thread of Abrams's endeavors from the late 1960s to the present.

Capturing the quality of intellectual and physical exploration that has been the constant companion of the 20th century, Abrams's prints are suffused with the fresh spirit of scientific inquiry. Like early botanical illustrations, Abrams's first engravings are compulsive in their detail. *Sleeping Sucker*, dating from the late 1960s, offers the surreal image of a pinched, hairy orifice rendered with meticulous technical precision. Evoking more humor than eroticism, *The Zoo* (1970) follows, a four-square grid of 16 variations on the same theme, hair-perfect in form, set off by a bold colored grid and ground.

In series after series of such pseudodocumentary studies, Abrams refines and amplifies her naturalist's powers of observation. But there's nothing dry or academic about these luscious, tongue-in-cheek prints. In *Sky Mice I* (1982), a mixed media drawing with intaglio, obscure furry striped insects are captured against a rich stippled ground, introducing Abrams's ineffable lichen hues that seem to emerge, like fungus, from within the very paper.

Compositions become more subtle and abstract as Abrams moves on to grapple with theory rather than direct observation. *Cosmic Intervention* is one of a series of mixed media drawings with intaglio in which an elegant silver grid, in this case replete with Greek script, is superimposed onto the print. The effect is that of the observer/scientist hunting for his own structure and imposing it onto raw technical data. Definitions of subject matter become looser and broader here, and a comical black and white barricade stripe is introduced, representing a fallacious barrier between fact and fantasy.

Testing for Strangeness, part of the artist's most recent series, finds the whole picture plane fragmented, and bits of stuff — idea, thought, memory and intuition — dance across its surface. The shadowy form of a four-fingered hand floats up from below. Like an ancient petroglyph, this recurring motif insists on the human presence in the context of pure abstraction. Even the black and white barricade loses its geometric authority here. Misshapen, it joins a controlled chaos that cheerfully coexists with the contemporary viewer's sense of invisible structure and well-developed threshold for simultaneous stimuli. Abrams's show moves magnificently from the naive

perceptions of a science in its infancy to works that incorporate late 20th century principles of uncertainty and a healthy respect for the power of the unconscious.

In contrast to Abrams's low local visibility, the work of Johansen has been seen here relatively often over the past year. The St. John's show complemented some recent exhibits, with nine works ranging from a masterful 1979 lithograph to a spanking new 1984 pastel.

Johansen's showpiece, *Artist and Model*, cannot be seen too often. The 14-color lithograph is not only a technical tour de force, but one imagines that the artist conspired with Bosch himself to create this paradoxical image of a manic artist fraternizing with the most grotesque of models.

Johansen is known and accepted for explicit sexual imagery loaded, from the feminine point of view, with misogynist undertones. Perhaps this exhibition of one too many flaming pink labia provoked the recent *It's Tough To Be A Man* (1984), a 200-inch-long pastel on paper. Four panels take the viewer from the blackened face of a man who hangs upside down against an impenetrable black ground, to a horizontal crucifixion, and on to a man who stands upright, in buffalo headdress, confronting a wild horse. This final image is set in a glib Southwest landscape of sandy mesa and cloudless blue sky. The work, overwhelmingly emphatic in both scale and imagery, could make a believer out of the best of us.

In keeping with the thoughtful curatorial concept of the new St. John's gallery, Bruce Lowney, the series's first featured artist, was responsible for the selection of Abrams and Johansen. And Lowney, together with Emily Kass of the UNM Art Museum, provided written comments in a helpful accompanying brochure.

— Nicole Plett

The Many Faces of Monotype



Fritz Scholder, *Another Summer Portrait No. 5*, from *New Mexico Monotypes*, Munson Gallery, Santa Fe.

Capitalizing on the widespread interest in monotype, the Munson Gallery invited 28 area artists to exhibit in its February show, *New Mexico Monotypes*. The project was a fine example of artists, exhibitors, and print shops working together to bring their product before the public. Hand Graphics, one of several regional print facilities represented, complemented the exhibit with a hands-on monotype workshop. *New Mexico Monotypes* left in its wake a viewing public, this reviewer included, better prepared to enjoy these prints from an informed perspective.

Speed and spontaneity are hallmarks of the monotype process. Working side by side with a master printer, the artist applies his inks directly to a metal or plexiglass plate; paper is then applied to the plate and both are rolled through a press.

Variety and experimentation in monotype technique was one of the show's real strengths. There were opaque rolled inks; loose, brushed on color; built up and blended color; veils of aqueous, transparent color; hard-edged collage; incised and scraped inks; and the wonderful, spontaneous intrusion of splattered solvents caught in the very process of dissolving the inks. Imaginary chatter passed back and forth from print to print and from room to room in this meeting of works in a single medium.

Some artists, notably Blue McRight and Kathy Morris, obviously enjoy the monotype for the way method and materials exert an independent force onto

Acoma dwellings blend with Quarai ruins; cold white radio telescope discs float by (rotating within the rotation), technology within nature within technology.

The imagery is more deliberate than previous Vasulka work, yet the basic vision remains the same. The Vasulkas' art is uniquely video. In their January Rein Gallery installation, *The West*, one sees the results of years of experimentation.

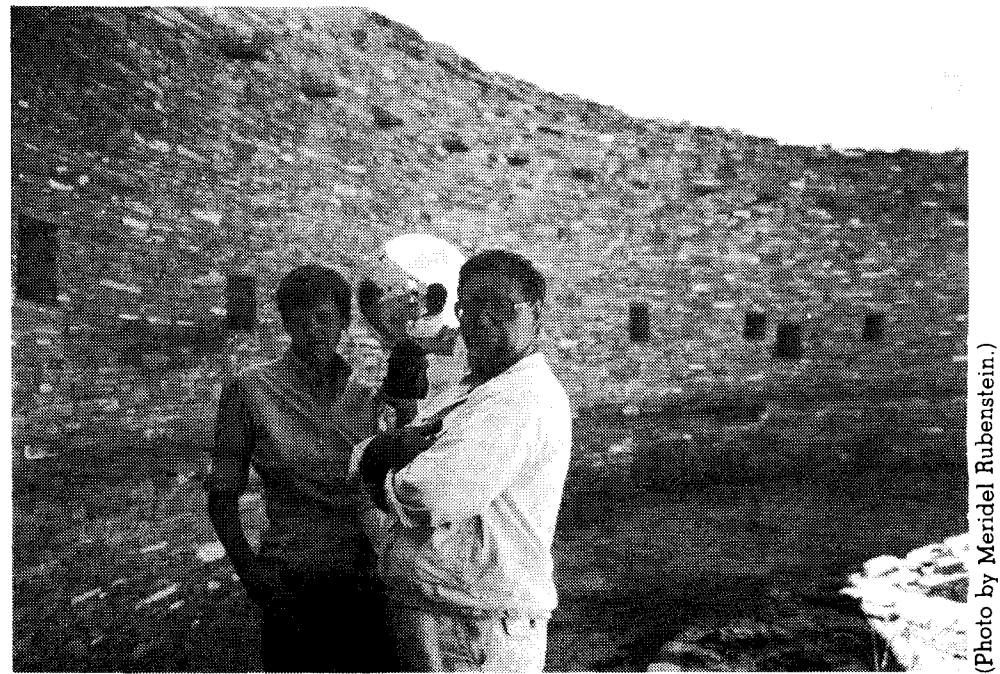
Video, like film, is concerned with moving pictures. Unlike film, light and time are recorded electronically, resulting in such particular characteristics as horizontal drift. This television viewer's problem becomes an aesthetic technique as images float from right to left and from screen to screen.

In the creation of *The West*, the human influence was held to a minimum. The camera was placed, without the benefit of a viewfinder, on a revolving turntable facing a highly reflective sphere. The whole world was gathered by this unblinking eye.

Images overlap and electronic colors mix naturally with landscape through a "soft-keyer." The machine "identifies" the foreground by comparing light values, and the result is a painterly style.

Mechanical manipulation may seem to leave the Vasulkas as observers rather than creators of this rotating world. One senses that their involvement is that of conductors of a visual symphony.

The lush weavings of landscape are left open to interpretation. At one moment one is sitting within a technological kiva, then



(Photo by Meridel Rubenstein.)

Steina and Woody Vasulka making *The West* at Chaco Canyon.

the finished work. McRight's image of a ghostly skull seemed to emerge uninvited from the blue-black ink. Morris exploited the potential of both chance and control in two lovely works set within opaque, mushroom gray borders.

Other artists fought the monotype. Benjamin Harjo's controlled edges and surfaces could have been readily accomplished in another print medium. Amado Pena tried unsuccessfully to utilize ghost images in a print triptych. And Russ Hamilton's large painterly landscape, overloaded with bright, mixed hues was curiously insensitive to the medium's lean power.

Overall, the loose, abstract use of monotype that dominated the show led to a blurred distinction between entries. Most surprising, print after print exhibited a color palette concentrated in the pink range. Setting herself apart from this crowd was Susan Linnell with a powerful collage-like print resonating with primary color. Nor was Fritz Scholder seduced by decorative hues, showing two sombre portraits with tragic undertones.

I was the helpless victim of the charm of Bill Gersh's *T. V. Dog Series III*, an impertinent salute to Frans Hals. In place of a mustachioed cavalier, Gersh offered us a gregarious laughing black dog, his gaping mouth revealing two rows of whiter than white teeth, presented with a master's economy of means.

— Nicole Plett

A Visual Symphony

Low tones vibrate throughout the C.G. Rein Gallery, drawing one toward a small room at the back. Inside, six video monitors hang at eye-level in a circle around a single seat. Within these boxes the universe turns.

With their move to New Mexico, Woody and Steina Vasulka's work has expanded to include the whole world: the stones of Chaco Canyon intertwine with sky;

floating along a moonscape, now wrapped in an electric landscape—all the time enveloped by pulsating sound.

The only drawback to this installation is that it could not continue indefinitely, as its timelessness would indicate.

Thanks to the Rein Gallery for embracing this artform, relatively unseen in Santa Fe.

— Penelope Place

Mind X-ploration

Space X marked the spot for the most extemporaneous and boisterous exhibition to happen in Santa Fe in some time. With 40 participating artists, the crowd at the opening last month at the Armory for the Arts was exhilarated to find so much activity in mid-winter. Organized by artists Nancy Sutor and Stuart Ashman, the exhibit was executed in 30 days, conception to realization. In a world where exhibit schedules are often concretized one to two years in advance, the feeling of Space X was definitely raw, raucous and a tad raunchy. But until it closes on March 5th, the Space X-hibition holds the potential for beginning a real dialog, provoking some healthy arguments, a place not only for a party but for communication.

The spirit of the event was not exclusionary. This was not an example of a group of artists challenging the public with a manifesto. This was not the Paris of the Surrealists who would place a fellow member on trial if they were not upholding the tenets of the group. There was no common theme, approach, or medium. The range of work was expert to exasperating. Stuart Ashman's flying shield-kites were excellent, suggesting how uncomfortably his previous paintings had been bound into a rectangular format, flat against the wall. *Lupe's Shield* and *Hanging Shield* were exciting new developments. My favorite piece in the show was Patrick Simpson's *Glade*, a metal table whose top was a forest of jagged