

ART REVIEWS/Helen A. Harrison

In Islip, Experimentation and Installation

'Lab Works'

Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip. Through Oct. 17. 224-5402.

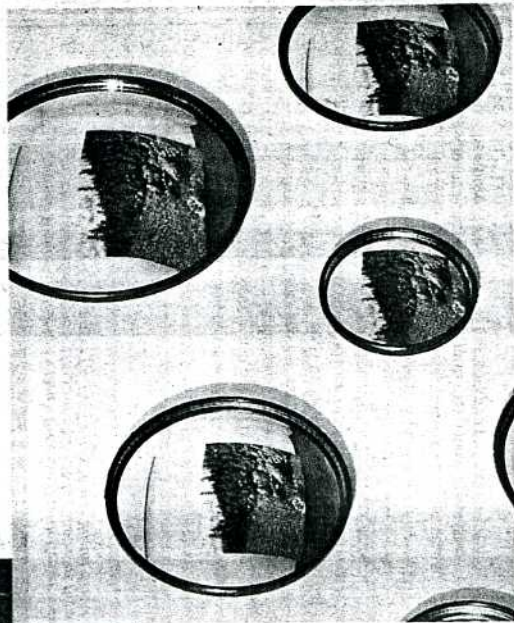
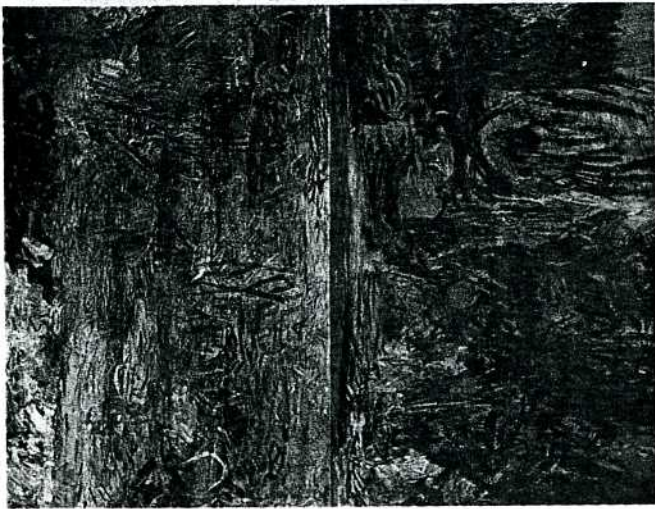
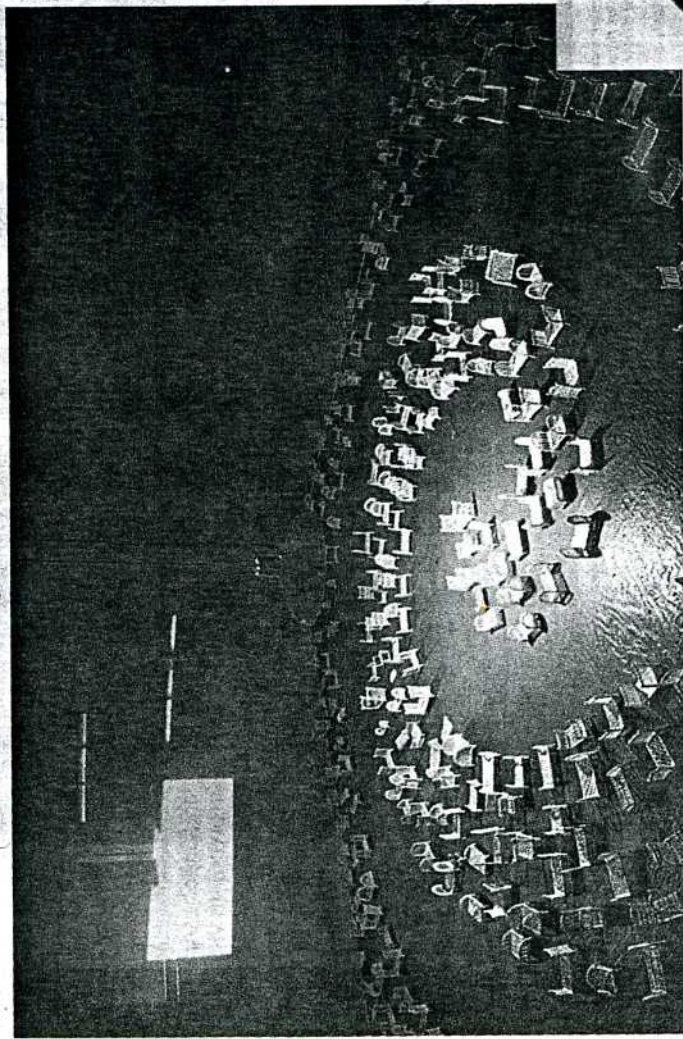
The laboratory itself is the subject of Catherine Wagner's stark photographs, which document the paraphernalia of research. Biological and mineral specimens, isolated in their sterile tubes and jars, are arrayed for analysis in visual terms, much as they have been dissected, probed and studied scientifically.

Elements, the basic substance of matter, are the starting point for works by Jeanette Cole and Nancy Lorenz. Ms. Lorenz evokes them metaphorically in poetic studies for larger mixed-media panels, some of which include actual elements, like gold and silver. Ms. Cole's gestural paintings, accompanied by symbols from the periodic table, allude to the fact that artists' pigments often contain toxic substances. In "Chemical Signature: Zn/Xe," the metal zinc and the gas xenon are abstracted as strokes of color that seem to struggle for dominance.

David Nyzio uses biological materials to create imagery that literally has a life of its own. His work is a kind of collaboration with natural processes, like the growth of algae in a luminous aquatic topiary garden. On photographic emulsion, the algae have flourished where exposed to light, starkly outlining the declaration that in this world, "Bacteria Rules." Natural phenomena also give rise to Heide Fasnacht's sculptural variations on the theme of eruption and explosion. "Volcano I," for example, resembles a concretion of lava nodules but also suggests the swirling maelstrom of volcanic wind.

Other, less tangible worlds inspire Mary Carlson and Steve Deibel, whose works derive from astronomy and physics. Mr. Deibel's iris prints are pictorial equivalents of constants like pi, gravity and the speed of light, flying form to intangible concepts. His multi-layered paintings imitate the grainy textures of satellite photographs that offer tantalizing glimpses of distant planets. In Ms. Carlson's eerie "Night Light," sculptures, far-off stars seem forever fixed in an unchanging universe, defying the laws of physics with their static stare.

Mary Ziegler's microscopic realms, activated by magnetism, are in constant motion. Her fascinating kinetic sculptures force bits of steel wire and iron filings to march along



A detail of "Isomnina," above, Susan Graham's installation at the Islip Art Museum's Carriage House; "Chemical Signature: Sm/Pm," above right, by Jeanette Cole; mirrors for viewing "Reflections on a Lake," by Devorah Sperber.

endless tracks, overcoming obstacles on journeys to nowhere.

'Projects '99'

Carriage House, Islip Art Museum. Through Sept. 26.

In these latest site-specific installations, 10 artists adapt their work to the Carriage House environment, some more convincingly than others.

On the exterior, Irina Danilova's "99 Angels" embellishes every 59th shingle with a fringe of gold Mylar. Flashing in the sunlight, fluttering in the breeze, the ephemeral rectangles nicely complement the wood finish. Although the piece is meant to evoke angelic presences, the effect is more sensual than spiritual.

Inside, the linear pattern of waistcoating suggested fortified walls and battlements to Niki Lederer. Her "Castle Construct" contrasts the idea of an imposing structure with the flimsiness of the cardboard of which it is made. Like a topsy-turvy stage set, the walls and ramparts descend from the ceiling and curve

along the floor, defying architectural

logic as well as the notion of solidity that a castle symbolizes.

Another remarkable transformation occurs in, of all places, the lavatory, which Paul Vilinski has turned into "Sanctuary," a fairyland of dancing shadows. Insects, leaves and human shapes, illuminated by tiny bulbs, cast shimmering silhouettes on every surface, completely recasting the utilitarian room as a garden of unearthly delights.

Illusions of space and scale are exploited with uncanny impact in Devorah Sperber's "Reflections on a Lake." The image is composed of thousands of spools of thread that when seen at close range look like a random arrangement of colored cylinders. Viewed from a distance, the colors coalesce to form a picture, as in a mosaic or a pointillist painting, but in this space the viewer cannot back up far enough to see it. Instead, one must look into small convex mirrors mounted on the opposite wall, where a vividly realized shoreline landscape appears. This amazing optical illusion raises issues of perception that deserve extended scrutiny — yet another aspect of reflection

that the work addresses. In an adjoining space, Celeste Fichter's "Green Room" is an elaborate homage to what the artist decries as a characteristically American brand of eccentric individ-

ualism. Her fictional alter ego's obsession with all things green, from furniture to chewing gum, has resulted in a kitschy tableau that might be the setting for a decidedly niche-market sitcom. So thoroughly is the Carriage House interior negated, however, that the room could have been installed virtually anywhere.

The same is true of Michael Buckland's "Entry," with its video reenactment of the artist as he breaks down a door mounted on a portable

wall, and Charles A. Gick's "Mops and Ocean," in which the repetitious motion of cleaning and waves beating on the shore are analogized. Ruth Adams uses the museum's nearness to the shore as a reference to possible disaster in "Flood," which imagines the building under water. A periscope-like device penetrates the ceiling and seems to find the water level far above, cleverly violating the structure while commenting on its vulnerability.