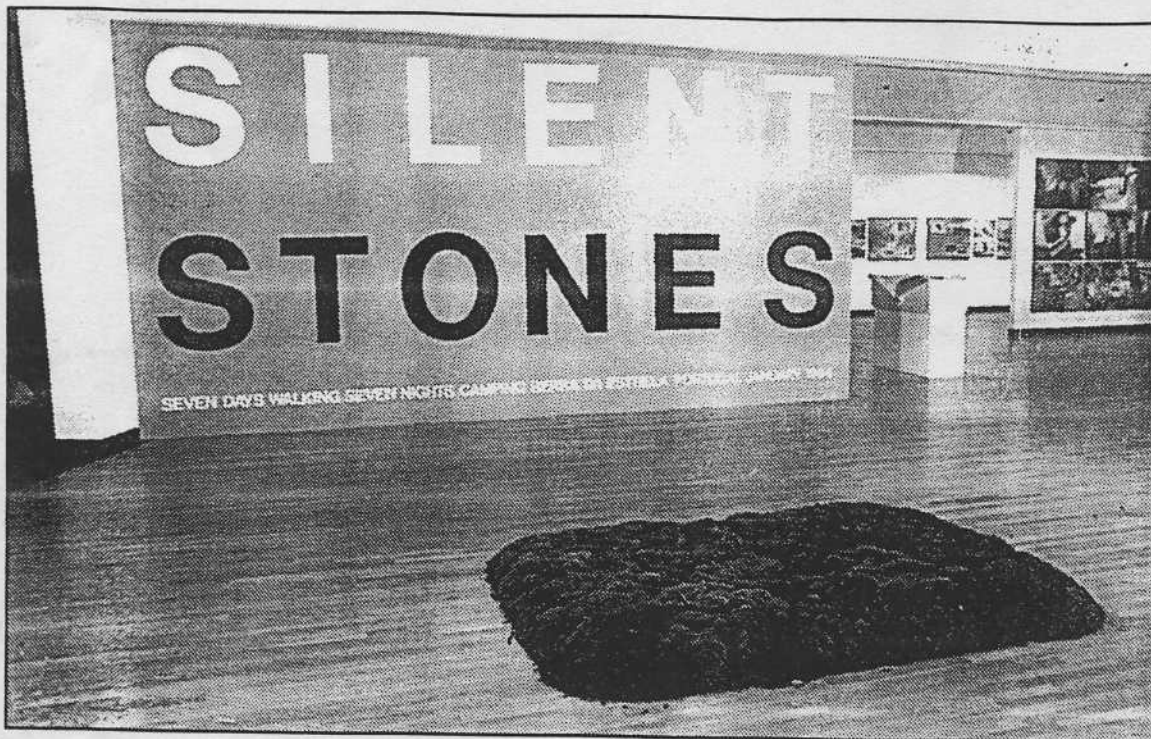


ART

On the Edge: Where Nature Comes Together With Culture



By WILLIAM ZIMMER

NATURE and culture meet at "The Edge of Town," the yeasty and idea-filled group exhibition at the Joseloff Gallery at the University of Hartford in West Hartford. Edge has several meanings in the show. Sometimes the meeting of the two forces is edgy and anxious. Sometimes the materials used are marginal art materials.

Like many contemporary exhibitions, the show depends a lot on photographs and the written word, but viewers will also find a bevy of old gloves, a lump of sod and a piece of plywood riddled with holes.

The curators — Zina Davis, who is the director of the Joseloff Gallery, and Bob Chaplin, an artist whose work has long explored the theme of the city and the landscape — have assembled a cast of 19 individuals or couples. The group is international in that Britain and Canada are heavily represented in addition to artists from the United States.

The curators have included several artists whose work dealt with the environment before that kind of

art grew into a full-fledged movement.

Robert Smithson, who died in a plane crash in 1973 while reviewing a work from the air, is represented by some simple ideas that had great impact on Conceptual art. One of them is a grid of photographs that alternates pictures of rocks in the ground with pictures of the depression in the land after the rocks have been removed. Another is the Oldenburg-like drawing for "Landslide with Pipes."

Christo, best known for his elaborate wrapping projects, has now merged his identity with that of his wife, Jeanne-Claude, so that they're a single artistic identity. This is a belated acknowledgment that Jeanne-Claude has always been instrumental in the projects — from the "Running Fence" of 1971-76 to the "Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin" staged this year. Both projects are represented by drawings.

The dogged and intrepid team of Helen Meyer Harrison and Newton Harrison, have long worn their environmental hearts on their sleeve. They are represented by a copiously documented project "The Book of

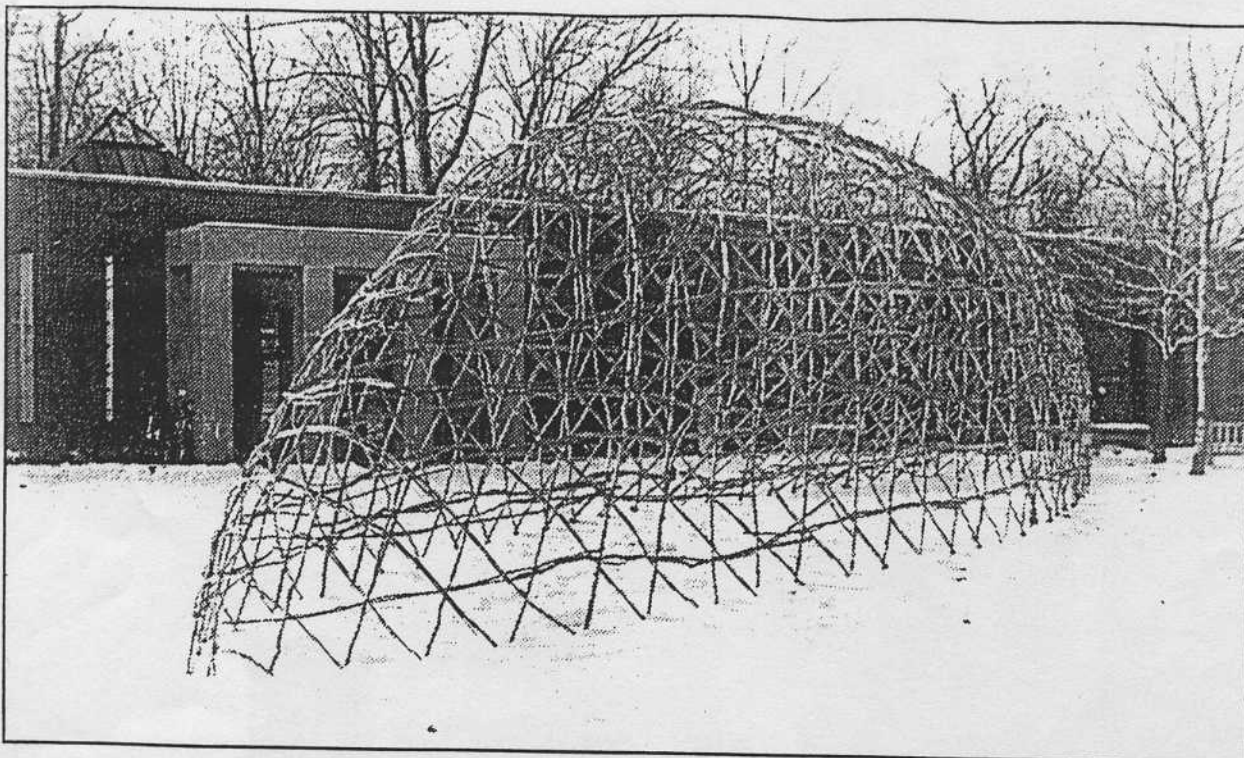
the Seven Lagoons." It's full of plans, hopes and dreams for reclaiming much of The Netherlands threatened with flooding.

In Manhattan, Alan Sonfist is best known for the primeval woods of indigenous plants he created in front of a supermarket. He's represented by plans for revitalizing parts of Paris by bringing back "historic vegetation."

Some sardonicism is evident in the work of two photographers, Nicholas Sinclair and Geoffrey James, who show once-idyllic landscapes marred by humans. Two others walk the landscape, and record what they see. Richard Long never touches anything; instead he makes lists of words hand-printed on a wall including tantalizingly, "fox" and "second fox."

Hamish Fulton, who took a 21-day, 692-mile walk across France, will move rocks to set up tableaux that he then photographs.

Sculptural objects in the show are of an especially brittle nature and that's what makes them compelling. Mierle Laderman Ukeles created a corridor or forest of work gloves donated by laborers in New York City and Hartford. The myriad of



Bob Chaplin

Left: "Silent Stones" by Hamish Fulton and "Moss Bed" by Meg Webster, foreground. Above: "Open Vessel," Chris Drury. Below: "Discovering South African Rock Art," Roger Palmer.



ghostly raised hands is like an enthusiastic meeting in a union hall.

The brashiest artist, Cornelia Parker, worked with the Colt Manufacturing Company in Hartford, which made casings for an arsenal of charms, the kind that dangle from bracelets, which the artist fired from a pistol at objects including the aforementioned plywood and a man's white shirt. She shot a die at a dictionary; fortuitously it struck "life insurance."

Just outside the Joseloff Gallery, Chris Drury built a large open-weave cranium-shaped shelter of sticks that resembles one of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes.

Some other artists used the immediate environs of the university. In addition to showing one of her low

mattress-shaped sculptures, "Moss Bed" on which the moss constantly increases, Meg Webster built a wild-life garden with children from a grammar school.

Karen McCoy placed sculptures that are both conical and comical at intervals outside the gallery leading to a creek. They are ear trumpets or, as she calls them, "listening posts" through which visitors are invited to listen to the ambient noises and perhaps echoes of West Hartford's geological past.

David Nash also shapes the landscape, but in England. He exhibits a drawing for a circle of trees bent into zig-zags through a process called "fletching." Arranged in a circle, these trees form a dome that seems to move rhythmically in the manner

of the figures in Matisse's "Dance."

Deserts or desert-like places are the sites for a few artists. John Craig has arranged — in the sober manner of an anthropologist — pottery shards and other specimens from Navajo culture. In the large-format Polaroid pictures he takes, lively mythological figures appear like specters amid the regular display of artifacts.

Roger Palmer often travels to South Africa, and his work concerns the displacement of signs and symbols. For instance, drawings of graceful but speedy springboks found on rock walls are made, appropriately, into mileage signs.

Marlene Creates uses photographs from her austere birthplace, Newfoundland, plus text to create a narrative of "presence and absence."

Two other artists are inspired by characters, one real and contemporary, the other with a hallowed place in 20th-century fiction. In a series of photographs with junkyard objects affixed to them, Stephen Willats documents the depressing routine of a West London girl named Pat Purdy who belongs to a "glue sniffers camp."

Victor Burgin gives the exhibition its dose of glittering culture with his grid of large double-exposed photographic images from Paris that pay homage to a founder of Surrealism, André Breton. ■

"The Edge of Town" is at the Joseloff Gallery at the University of Hartford in West Hartford, through Jan. 15.