

Art in park: Good, but oh, you Kagan

"Tricentennial Salute to Sculpture." Outdoor exhibit at Academy-Lafayette Park, across from Albany City Hall on Washington Avenue. Through July 31.

By Julie Wyatt
For The Knickerbocker News

Any exciting idea needs proper professional implementation to materialize as a prizewinner. Last winter, Lew Swyer, head of the Albany Tricentennial Commission, proposed an outdoor sculpture show in Academy-Lafayette Park to Janis Dorgan, director of the Rice Gallery at the Albany Institute of History and Art.

Review

Dorgan agreed to curate the show and by March had invited 18 blue ribbon regional sculptors to participate. The exhibition, "Tricentennial Salute to Sculpture," is now on display in the park, which is located across from City Hall and the state Capitol, bordering on Washington Avenue.

Among the 29 multi-media, multi-styled works, a 10-foot-tall wooden figure, "Lady Albany," by Marjorie White Williams, reigns supreme on the brow of the hill. Made of laminated bands of plywood, coated with Polyurethane, the buxom, barrel-shaped Dutch hausfrau with elbows jutting out and hands placed firmly on her ample hips wears a pugnacious, feisty expression under her wide-brimmed straw hat. From now on, instead of the Dutch ship, Lady Albany should be the official logo. Full of whimsy and delightful humor, the work deserves a permanent public site in Albany.

Oddly enough, Bill Strong used the same domineering posture stance in his steel sculpture "Barge Annie." Executed from steel beams and plates, the cut-out female outline form recalls the days when freight barges were trafficking heavily between Buffalo and New York City. According to folklore, Annie buried her husband in the Erie Canal and then took his place as captain of the barge.

It wasn't until the exhibition was

being installed that Williams and Strong discovered each had the same concept.

Leo is back in Tim Cunard's "One See s One Looks On" ("Leo's Search"), but this time Leo is facing his twin on top of a pair of seven-foot-tall pillars. Dressed in long frock coats, the figures face one another at rigid, unyielding attention. It's so good to see Leo again. He reminds me of so many disliked people in this people in this world.

Abstract forms appeal to the artists for varied reasons. Milkowski likes his large steel works to be placed on a slope so that the geometric modules are accessible to adults and children. He likes them to use his sculptures. The repetition of boxlike pastel painted steel in a frieze format evoke a delicate sense of femininity.

By juggling elements, Stephen Day creates the suggestion of the ghost of a figure. Gregory Smith striates the human form on abstract terms. Mary Pat Wager's studied arrangement of black steel rectangles projects a rhythmic pattern of horizontal and vertical shapes. The philosophy of Dennis Connors on man and nature is evident in the diagonal pull of linear steel assemblages.

Tom Schottman relates to nature. His six-foot-tall unglazed stoneware pieces resemble fragments found in an archaeological pre-Columbian dig. On the same wave length, Herb Parker uses the temple or shrine motif. Sod covers a steel frame, making the structure appear as an ancient ruin.

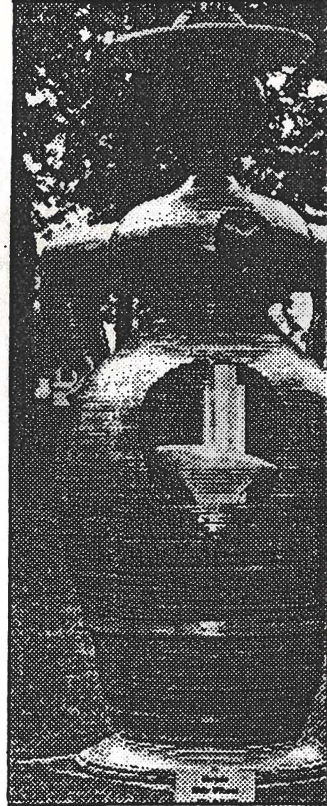
The most controversial work in the exhibiton is Larry Kagan's "Free-for-All." He used two dumploads of scrap from the Port of Albany to build a sculpture depicting the "rawness in art." He wanted viewers to see where artists salvage discarded items like rusted steel, broken wheels, warped signs and a chunk of wrought-iron railing to incorporate into their works of art.

Kagan's approach was to deliberately create a perplexing situation for

viewers to see where it all ends and begins again. Unfortunately, his deep, thought-provoking conceptualism does not communicate itself to the public. Nothing wrong with his initial idea, but he went wrong with its implementation.

The mistake is that Kagan did not create enough space for the depth and volume of the work. Sometimes a volume can create its own space but that did not happen here. Instead, the sculptural form is too enclosed and crowded. Hence, the balance is thrown off between the composition and its construction. As a result, the objects cannot respond and interact with each other. They remain inert and inexpressive, unable to rise above being a pile of junk.

The other artists in this show are Brian Auwarter, Robert Blood, Maria Hall, Mark Eliot Schwabe, Arlene Shulman, Nora Simon and John Wine-land.



"LADY ALBANY"
... of plywood