

An exhibit of carved restraint

Altamont sculptor's works her statement on bonds

By John Tarlton

Special Correspondent

In 1979, Margorie White Williams broke the chains of an 18-year teaching career that had elevated her to director of the art department at the Albany Girls Academy, only to be bound again by another set of chains.

Yet the new bonds, the responsibility of actively pursuing a full-time career as a sculptor, would never seem to her so restraining.

"I do not regret the time I devoted to teaching," says Williams, 56, who graduated in 1981 with a master's degree in art from the College of Saint Rose.

"Yet somehow this too was acting as a restraint against my own personal growth as an artist. These matters that as a student and teacher I had learned and taught made for a sound art program in a kindergarten to 12th grade situation, yet somehow could no longer further my own personal development."

And it is precisely those psychological fences inherent in restraint, from the torturous to the ecstatic push and pull of human emotions, deprivations of inner needs and wants, birth and death that viewers confront as they walk along the 34 wood, cast plastic, metal, found objects and fiber sculptures created by this soft-spoken, determined Altamont artist.

In this world, regimented wood soldiers stand at attention and, across the gallery floor, faceless turned-wood bus riders stare blankly, all in the same direction.

Williams focuses on the alienation and disenchantment of the spirit, "especially those of women."

Les Urbach, director of the Center Galleries that will house the exhibit until May 6, says the artist's works, which date from her student days to the present, are "Some of the finest personal yet archetypal visual statements concerning the human condition shown in our region for some time."

"Essentially all the pieces are me," Williams said. "I make things and objects to see — to see myself. The sculptures are derived from my need to portray the feelings and longings of my own personal escape — as artistic liberation from the domestic or historical patternings and roles which come with being a woman in our society. I see these sculptures as kinds of visual metaphors for the human relationships which I as a woman have experienced."

Experience, it would seem, is a key word for Williams' exhibit. In laminated or turned-wood vase and pedestal imprisonments are found the embodi-

ment of the human spirit personified by cast plastic sections of faces, arms and legs that are either encased within their wooden cells or are forever frozen in a protruding attempt at escape.

Here is an art drawn from Williams' well of experience, so much so that the 1949 graduate of Skidmore College and mother of three grown children concedes that "I suppose I could be criticized for self-indulgence, that exploring birth, sex, motherhood, marriage and death is a self-service."

This perhaps might be the case if it were not for the fact that we all, as civilized, socialized animals, did not

come instinctively to this same well to drink.

"I am a feminist, yet not a violent one," says Williams, who also studied with such locally known artists as William Wilson and Dennis Byng at the State University of Albany. "It is better for me to editorialize upon the plight of women (and mankind in general) by a more subtle, sculptural form."

And through Williams' sculptural forms we are presented with a collection of work that visually screams the frustration and tensions associated with unfulfilled ambitions.

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CHAINED — Majorie White Williams' works, including this haunting *Balance of Terror*, depict restraint and unfulfilled ambition.

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In addition to the laminated wood and cast plastic embodiments of entrapment and attempted liberation (10 of which have never been on public view before), Williams also expands her themes with a series of large handmade doll forms whose physical attitudes range from the petite-cute to the pathetically tragic.

"I had always identified with dolls, with their role of manipulability and of being precious possessions to be acquired, admired and misunderstood."

With this thought in mind, it seems only natural Williams should employ the doll image to illustrate such topical matters as overeating (this portly, painted epoxy representation of overindulgence comes complete with both arms full of junk food and hamburger packages), the plight of minority groups within our society, women's rights and the abortion issue.

Yet the entombment of the individual into prescribed role-playing is only a facet of this exhibit. Here also, in such works as the wood-based, unsanded rough plastic cast of a human head, entitled "Jack in the Boxes," is Williams' visual condemnation of the abuse and potentially tragic consequences of improper use of nuclear power.

The pedestal, reminiscent of a smoke stack, upon which the melting head perches is, according to Williams, "An intellectualization of the cooling towers such as those found at Three Mile Island and concerns itself with the devastation and human deformity which could occur."

"I don't know where this will all lead," she concludes, "perhaps it's important to just follow the doing."