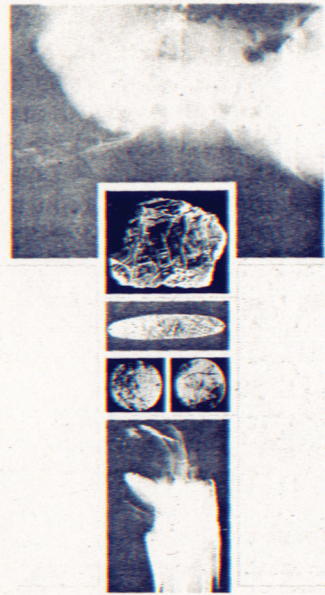


# TRADITIONAL FORMS, UNIVERSAL CONCEPTS

Oakland / Andree Marechal-Workman

In many ways the concerns of most Western artists since World War II have been an exploration of new media and the communication of ideas through manipulation of new techniques and



Arne Hiersoux, "Digs — L," 1981, lithograph on Stonehenge paper, 30" x 22", at the Magnolia Gallery, Oakland. © Arne Hiersoux. Photo: Richard Sargent.

heretofore untried materials. The results have often been esoterically complex works whose message sometimes was not readily accessible to the noninitiate, and too often impossible to translate into literary terms. Reacting against such practices, many artists who are now emerging on the contemporary scene show an inclination to return to more traditional materials and forms; in their work they address what they consider to be universal issues relating to — among other things — scientific and space exploration, religious thought, spiritual concepts and moral imperatives. Two such artists are Donald Farnsworth and Arne Hiersoux, who express vastly different concerns through media which reach back hundreds of years into the history of printmaking, yet which are achieved with very modern means. Their respective exhibits, heralding the opening of the Magnolia Gallery, relate to each other only in that both refer to the passage of time, and both were processed at the Magnolia Press.

Farnsworth exhibits a suite of collages titled the *Nagashizuki Series*, produced by means of an ancient Japanese

technique that developed over 1500 years of papermaking. The *nagashizuki* technique, which means "flowing water" in Japanese, enables the artist to layer thin tissues of paper, entrapping in his imagery billions of thin, strong fibers that create sensuously delicate, lacy patterns and texturized surfaces. Although the product is both visually pleasing and intriguing in concept, like much paper art, the process is almost more fascinating than the end result. Using an old, handmade Japanese screen and contemporary equipment manufactured at the Magnolia complex, Farnsworth starts with simple sheets of paper dipped in various vats of color and manipulated in their wet state with stencils and sprays of water. Then he cuts, shreds, tears, peels and, layering and collaging several thicknesses and consistencies in varied shapes, builds up geometrically organized compositions in which juxtapositions of opposites have an important role. In most of the works, parallel bands of color are played against metallic and dark-hued triangles arranged vertically over diffused color fields — often suggesting Chinese

landscape paintings. In one instance, the landscape feeling is reinforced with an organically rendered, shadowy veil that seems to act as a cloud hovering on parts of, and shrouding, light-speckled mountain tops. But the content of Farnsworth's collages, regardless of their form, is always about contrast between the universal concepts of heaven and earth, opposition and harmony. "Touched by the fragility of life," he says, "I am in awe of the continual cycle of birth and decay and its relationship to the progression of the human spirit."

Arne Hiersoux's lithographs are also concerned with birth and death cycles, but their message is both more personal and more directly explicit. Using a sort of grid format with shapes hovering in space, he ties together past, present and future by juxtaposing cosmic symbols and pilot charts over petroglyphs, radiographs and diagrams of archeological digs. Very formal in composition, though their size is small, they are monumental in character, both visually and symbolically — reminding us that a human lifespan is but a speck of dust upon the matrix of time. □

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