

Double
Vision





Hallwalls
February 13-March 25
1988

Bronx Council on the Arts
Longwood Arts Gallery
April 16-May 27
1988



Double
JOHN ALLEN
RICHARD R. ARMIJO
EMILY CHENG
ALBERT CHONG
EUGENIO ESPINOSA
TYRONE MITCHELL
HOWARDENA PINDELL
HELEN RAMSARAN
CARRIE YAMAOKA
CHARLES YUEN
VisIon
FRED • WILSON

GUEST CURATOR

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Preface



Double Vision is the 6th exhibition sponsored by Hallwalls' Visiting Curator Program. With generous support from the Museum Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, this program enables artists and promising young curators to create new exhibitions which critically examine significant aspects of contemporary art. This provides a much needed outlet for experimental curatorial projects while enhancing the diversity and quality of Hallwalls' program of visual art exhibitions.

I am very greatful to the Bronx Council on the Arts for their support of this exhibition, and happy that the show will be installed at the Longwood Arts Project. I wish to thank Fred Wilson and essayist Kellie Jones for offering us an exhibition and catalogue of exceptional interest.

Catherine Howe

Exhibitions Program Director

An Appreciation of Double Vision



I

*Art is an incantation, and I
am the magician-storyteller.*
—Camille Billops

In "Double Vision" curator Fred Wilson brings together the work of ten artists whose work is for the most part abstract. While the non-objective qualities of the art on view emphasize formal concerns of the Western tradition—the challenges of image to ground, shape to shape, and shape to line and color—there are underlying connections to non-Western cultures. This point is not as forced as it might seem, considering that European interest in the art of Asia, Africa, and the Americas impelled the creation of modern abstraction. The artists grouped here, as descendants of various non-Western cultures, are inspired by and feel the connection of heritage; yet they are not only residents of this country but have been trained in Western technique and aesthetics. It is the duality between inheritance and contemporary questions that is expressed in their work.

Unlike artists of the Harlem Renaissance or those of the Black Cultural Nationalist movement of the sixties and seventies, the artists in "Double Vision" do not unequivocally venerate their ancestral traditions. Rather theirs is a critical and selective stance, the same one they use to define their relationship to Western culture. This is perhaps the essence of post-modern posture: the realization that the "progressive" modernist program cannot be accepted wholesale, leading to the appropriation of certain non-Western cultural properties or influences. Yet, as the curator has

stated, the work of these artists "avoids the stereotypical cartoon and the exotic image so readily available to be appropriated from the Western view of 'foreign' lands." Neither does the work have an overtly political or didactic approach. Rather, each of these artists, in individual ways, is attempting to invent a new visual language based, in part, on the philosophy of duality.

As the photographer Roy DeCarava once said "Black people have a spiritualism, maybe because for so long they had nothing else." Enslaved blacks were stripped of their material culture: dance, religion, and song survived as intangible emblems of their traditional society. Among voluntary immigrants the pressures of assimilation are still very real; spirituality, the incorporeal essence of culture, can be retained. Much contemporary art criticism has heralded the death of the spiritual in art and focused on the omnipotence of consumer culture (appropriation, in these terms, is emblematic of this trend). It is obvious, however, that spirituality cannot be easily eliminated, at least in the work of artists of color. Thus photographer Albert Chong's *tableaux vivants*, titled "I Traits," are manifestations of the mystical, contemporary allegories of ancient African heritage. His recent still lifes are shrine-like and their large scale envelops the viewer in ritual. Helen Ramsaran considers some of her sculpture to be "enlarged versions of the pouch-like amulets and talismans traditionally worn in West African societies, which were believed to protect warriors from danger." Pieces of poems flourish in certain of Richard Armijo's paintings, their measured phrases like incantations. The visceral creatures that populate Charles Yuen's work confront each other as symbols of psychic relationships. And while Howardena Pindell may appropriate images of Japanese temples and Indian Buddhas into her collaged paintings, as a black woman she is sensitive to their integrity, having lived abroad and knowing that her own culture is also raided for its lifeblood.

"Double Vision" denies the completeness of the melting pot myth. Instead it affirms the regenerative and indefatigable force of that other part of world culture, not the West but the rest.

Kellie Jones
January 1988

Double Vision



“**D**ouble Vision” is an exhibition of

Fred Wilson

works by contemporary artists living in the New York City Metropolitan Area, who seeking to create a new aesthetic, draw from elements of non-western culture. These artists recreate language and symbolism using visual, verbal and philosophical elements from lands where the majority of the world's people live, think and create (Africa, Asia, and Latin America).

John Allen, Emily Cheng and Carrie Yamaoka are concerned with the duality in and the differences between the western/non-western, the two ways of seeing. All three artists compare one side of the canvas to the other, or one object within the painting to another facing object. John Allen has gone as far as to place two separate paintings, similar in size, shape and image but vastly different in color, side by side. The ensuing dialogue between passionate and somber color as in Allen's “Passion”, between diaphanous and solid shapes as in Yamao-

ka's "Indemnities", and between the spiritual and the analytical forms and spaces in Cheng's "Status Quo" presents a microcosm of conflicts and communications between East and West. There is much more going on in these works than a mere relationship between a visual left side and right side; it is clear to this curator that a cultural duality is being expressed. It is not on a theoretical level—an observable difference, but on an intuitive and personal one, by artists who have had a deep and profound experience with two vastly different cultures.

Both Eugenio Espinosa and Tyrone Mitchell use nature to express emotions. Espinosa creates sculptural paintings and Mitchell, painterly sculptures. Both artists juxtapose hard edged, man-made geometric shapes with fluid botanical forms. These artists tend to be interested less in the conflicting differences between these two elements but rather, as ivy becomes one with a brick building, the creation of a new form enhanced by both qualities.

While Albert Chong and Helen Ramsaran are interested in the distillation of culture, particularly through the Caribbean, Charles Yuen creates another world. His paintings are alive with life forms—perpetual

“others”—with many different colorful cultures and languages. It might be Yuen’s wry metaphor for life on earth. These foreign beings’ survival is interdependent on one another; yet, they seem to have little understanding of or sensitivity to one another.

Richard Armijo chooses a conceptual approach to investigate the notion of perceiving and of being perceived. Writing on the canvas at once draws you in to experience the painting but then stops you with its message. Both he and Howardena Pindell avert the western tradition of painting: Armijo by painting on other fabrics besides canvas in flag-like shapes; and Pindell by using unstretched, sewn canvas covered with glitter and powder.

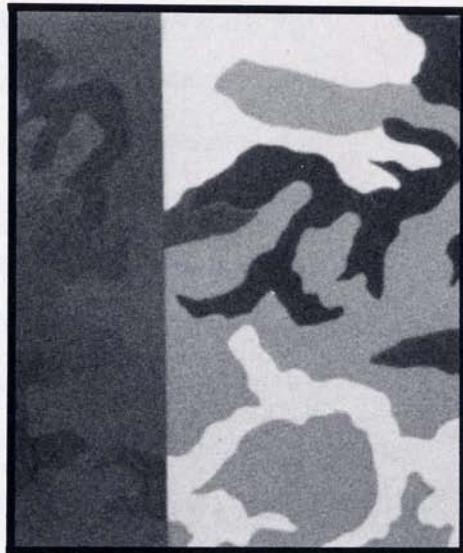
Many of the artists affirm the importance of rhythmic repetition, dreams and story-telling in non-western cultures through their work. All ten artists synthesize the world’s spiritual, cultural and intellectual information for purely aesthetic reasons rather than to merely survive within a dominant culture.

The artists in “Double Vision” are not alone in this endeavor to make visibly real a deep understanding of world culture and the flowering of new forms. Anish Kapoor’s sculpture covered with pure pigment,

Martin Puryear's finely crafted objects made in rich, natural materials, Ping Chong's multi-media performances, and Jessica Hagedorn's poetry and prose are well respected contemporaries with diverse work but similar philosophies. However, this movement is not without precedent. One could not write about this topic without mentioning Isamu Noguchi and Wilfredo Lam. Lam, the Afro-Asian Cuban artist, is an inspiration to more than one of the artists in this exhibition. Noguchi's long career was founded in and has flourished on a bedrock of an aesthetic shaped by dual heritage.

The painting, photography and sculpture in this exhibition do not overtly make political statements or statements of current events. Rather, this is a subtle manifesto to retake the lost cultural growth which resulted from colonialism and western ethnocentric, worldwide, mass media. Their art avoids the stereotypical cartoon and the exotic image so readily available to be appropriated from the western view of "foreign" lands. The reason? It's not foreign. These artists are the descendants of peoples from non-western cultures. This makes their work ring true and reinforces their need to create, and create this kind of work.○

JOHN
Allen



left: detail

right: Guardian

1986

12" x 48"

enamel on steel



RICHARD R.

A rmijo



left: detail

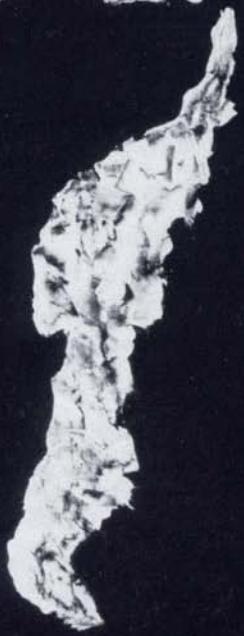
right: untitled

1987

16" x 22" each panel

oil, graphite, acrylic
on wood

NO LOITE
RINO

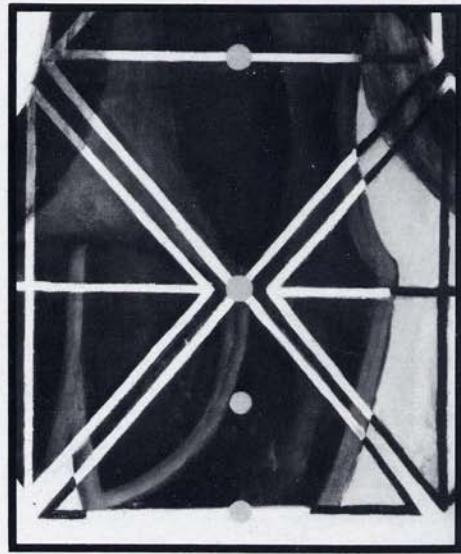


RINO



EMILY

Cheng



left: detail

right: Status Quo

1987

82" x 70"

oil on canvas



EUGENIO

Espinosa



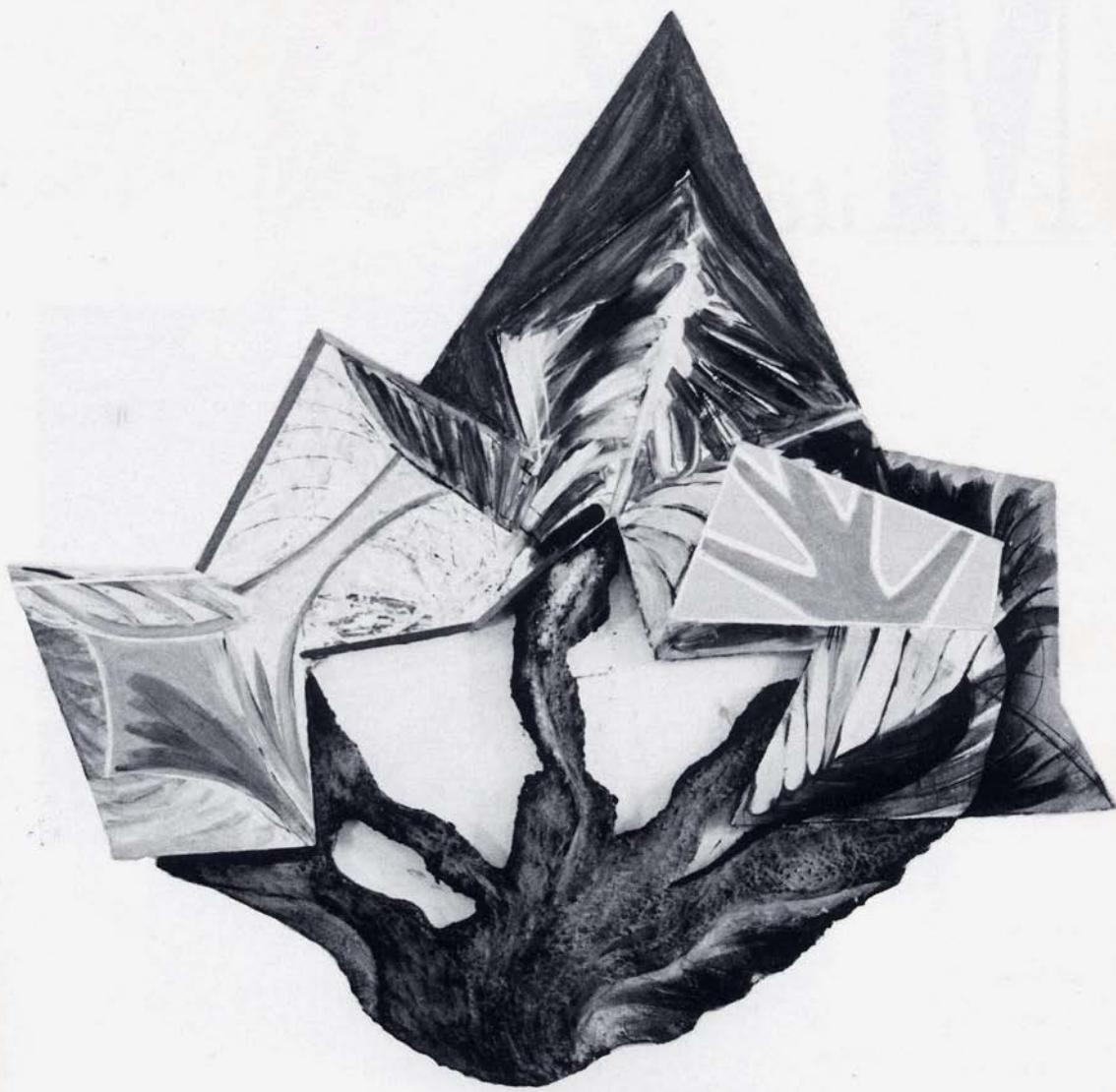
left: detail

right: House-Tree-Person

1987

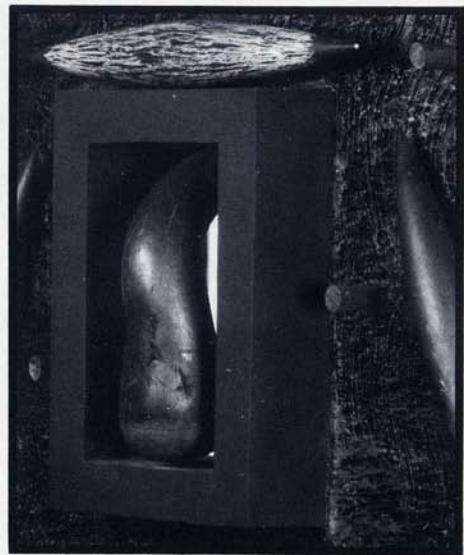
64 1/2" x 75"

acrylic on masonite and carved polystyrene



TYRONE

Mitchell



left: detail

right: **Home**

1987

9' x 7' 6" x 9"

wood and pigment

Photo credit: John Berens



HOWARDENA

Pindell



left: detail

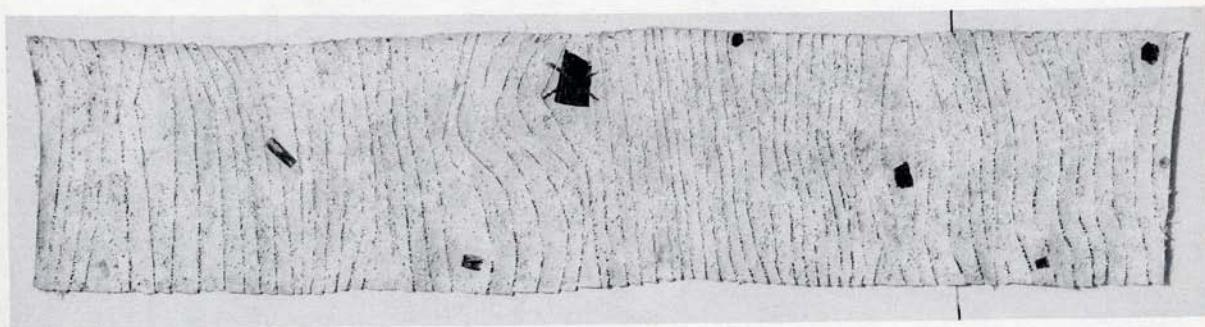
right: Scroll Series: Tarot Hanged Man

1980-81

36" x 164"

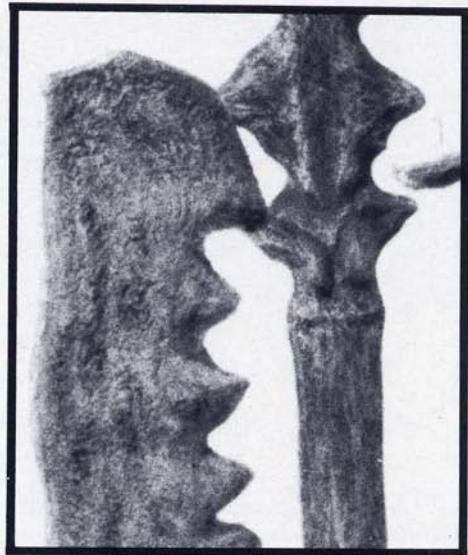
acrylic, guache, tempera, photo transfer

glitter, powder on sewn canvas



HELEN

Ramsaran



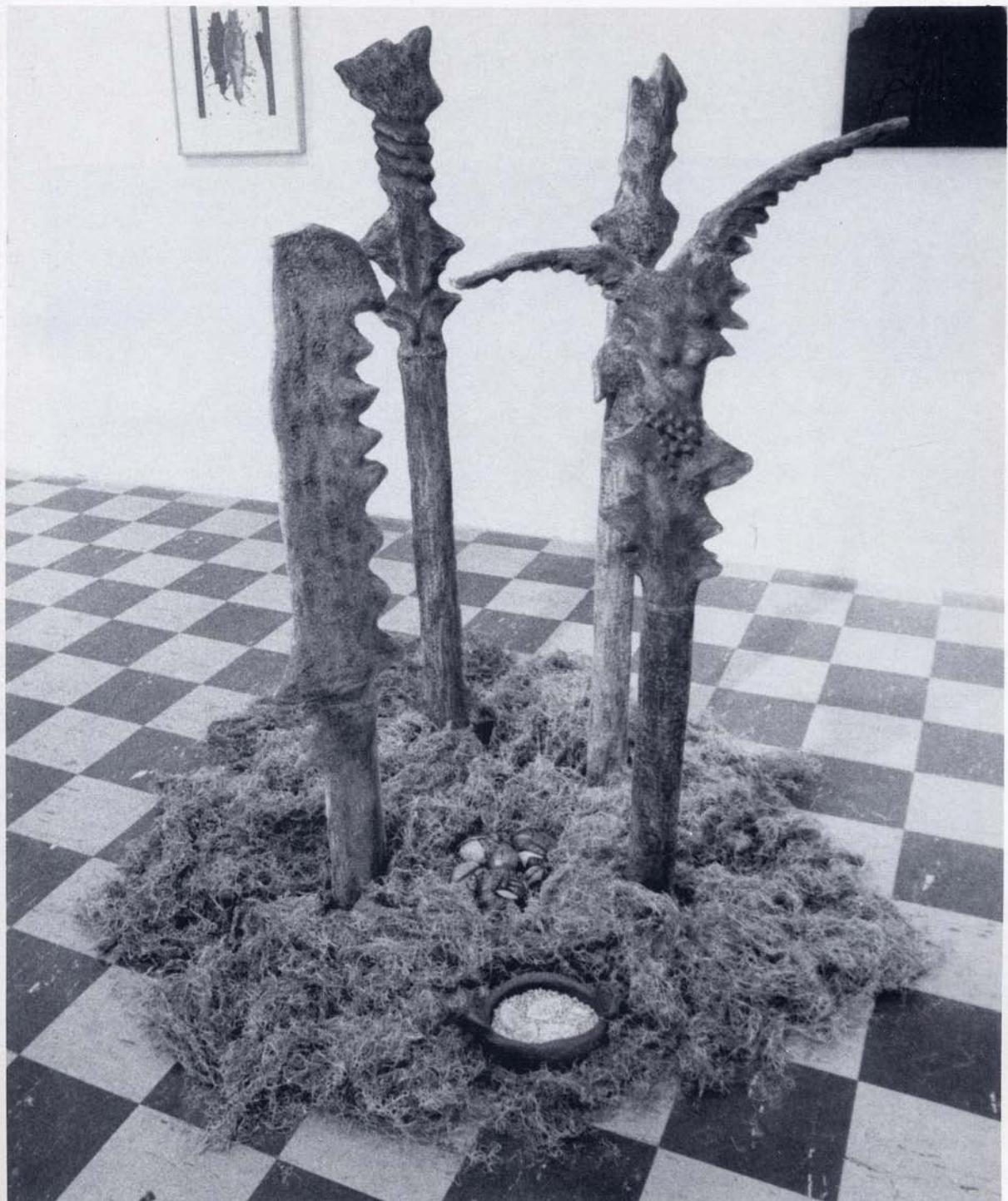
left: detail

right: untitled

4'5" x 4' x 3'6"

1987

handmade paper, clay, moss, pigment



CARRIE
Yamaoka



left: detail

right: Indemnities

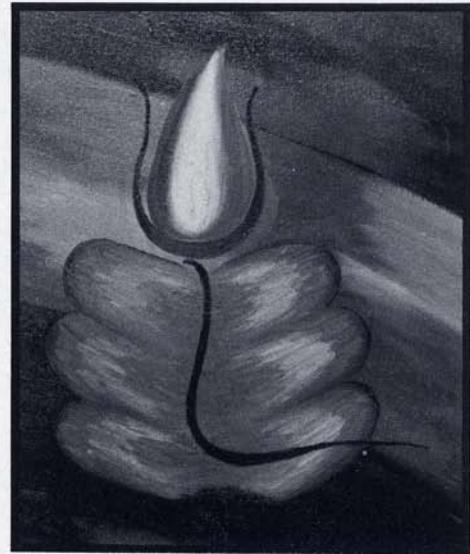
1987

14"x16"

oil on canvas



CHARLES
Y
uen



left: detail

right: Home on the Range

47" x 84"

1987

oil on canvas



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