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ART: Richard Armijio's "Felix" is part of the "Unaffiliated Artists" exhibit at Artists Space.

ART:

Artists Space Taps Its Files in a Fresh, Impressive Exhibit

BY RICHARD AMDUR

So you've had it with those pretentious, hush-hush, off-putting galleries that try to inspire reverence for art instead of fostering the healthy dialogue between artist and viewer that is the true strength of artistic discourse!

Then it's time you headed to Artists Space on lower Houston Street in Tribeca. Mining the depths of its "Unaffiliated Artists Slide File" (which may be one of few exhibition venues for New York State artists not represented by commercial galleries), Artists Space has mounted a show that's impressive and refreshing on two counts—first, for the powerful satire, statement, and illusion displayed here, and second, for the anticipation implicit in the knowledge that the slide file contains close to 1500 other surprising artists and their treasures.

Erika Rothenberg's computers provide the fun. Based on the entire human brain (not just the parts that reason), these crafty consoles make up for the conventional computer's lack of humanity, with monitors for things like Headaches, This Year to Date, People Forgotten, Percent of Brain in Use, and Cells Dividing Now.

FAITH IN COMPUTERS?

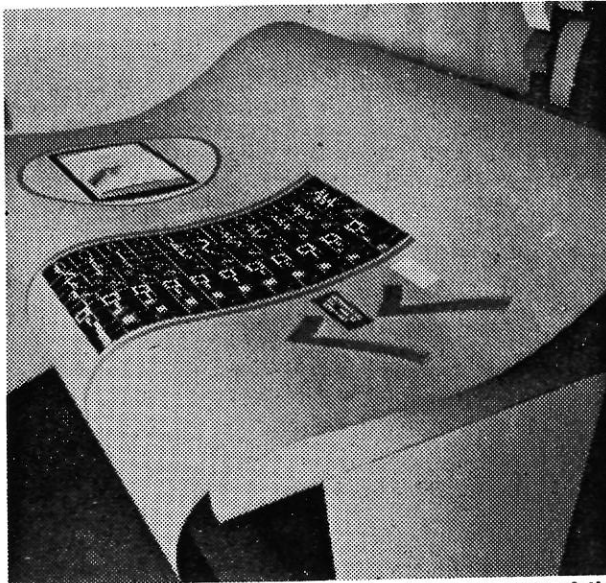
At the same time, however, whatever faith we may have left in computers is jolted. Certainly one would agree that the definitively accurate computer would also gauge our tendencies towards the seven deadly sins (as Rothenberg's does)—but would you trust a computer that, ennobled with the task of telling us when the world will end, is more likely to follow the Yankee scores?

For a more subtle statement, Andrew Nash's bland constructions—looking almost like plastic Lego pieces—serve as odes to the facades and surfaces of the transient, highway kingdom, the United States. Diners, cookie-cutter suburban homes, corporate headquarters, all get their send-up. In contrast to his work is Julie Wachtel's spooky silhouette inching across the poster-sized images of Fidel Castro, Rod Stewart, Jim Morrison, a French flower child, and finally a young girl in a wet suit with a fiery, crashing airplane painted on her torso.

Subtlety is not Wachtel's concern. Rather, we see echoed here the widespread feelings of being engulfed and inundated by enormous media symbols and hype that try to make everything seem monumental (when only very little can truly be so).

GOTHAM NIGHTMARE

Balancing this quasi-realism are the frightful and giddy expressions that make up Conrad Vogel's and Jay Coogan's work. The former's "Visiting Times," and "Night Violence" are amalgams of wood, sand, dry powder



Erika Rothenberg's computer constructions are part of the "Unaffiliated Artists" exhibit at Artists Space.

pigment and a possibly paranoid psyche that represent, respectively, a rotted, fire-breathing carcass writhing and vaulting in air, and a bat-infested, smoke-filled festering gotham nightmare.

Too scared by these visions? Then step into Jay Coogan's installation—a surreal layout of not-quite-square-or-round, black-and-white, two-and-three-dimensional, oddly-and-familiarly-shaped pieces that suggest at very least an Yves Tanguay landscape and at most playful (delightful!) an entirely new planetary experience. One can almost sense a change in the room's gravitational pull.

Eight more artists make the "Selections" show so fresh and impressive that one only hopes the slide file will be tapped for talent more often.

SELECTIONS FROM THE UNAFFILIATED ARTISTS FILE, Artists Space, 105 Hudson Street, 226-3970, thru Apr 25.