

rendered. A reconstruction of Pat Trimble's starkly conceptual photographic sequences, mailed out to a hundred or so people, complemented the other women's flights of fancy.

—Peter Frank

Betty Parsons

(Kornblee Gallery, January 8-February 3) At 77, Betty Parsons is one of the most vigorous artists working in New York. For over 30 years she has been the Betty Parsons Gallery, representing the leaders of post-1945 American art. She has watched styles and attitudes come and go; but for those 30 years, she has been quietly pursuing her own unique vision. About 10 years ago, she began picking up stray pieces of lumber that drifted onto the beach in front of her Long Island studio. The 32 painted wood constructions at Kornblee are where all this energy came to rest in January.

Betty's beachfront must have a special magnetism. Strange and wonderful shapes and forms come to rest there, functional wood reclaimed by nature. Once chosen, Parsons gives these aged and weathered surfaces new life by painting them with bright, fast-drying acrylics. The color combinations are crisp and primitive, and I think totally unique.

These rejuvenated shapes accumulate in her studio, leaning against walls, cluttering table tops, crammed beneath her workbench. There they wait. The building of the sculpture is another process. Parsons works in the middle of the floor, creating her own jigsaw puzzle, as her own uncanny eye finds what works. The constructions are balanced, natural, almost logical once you enter the artist's world. Shapes fit into and atop one another as if waiting for that particular spur of movement to combine them. Repeated color stripes dance and flash against each other, dedicated to

spontaneous energy and the instant play of color.

The work sometimes takes on literal form in miniature worlds—*Little Theatre*, the perfect summerstock storefront, *Singing*, a line of orange and blue clothespin birds, *George*, a rather friendly spook. At other times, a more poetic Parsons is in charge: *Memoire*, an indirect homage to Jung, *Carnival Fantasy*, a small frenzy of zigzags, like a confetti parade. Whim and frolic are present throughout. *Magic Door* has a key forced into the natural hole at the center of the sculpture. A very small piece of wood hangs from a rusty nail, and instead of ignoring it, Parsons celebrates the survivor by painting a purple circle on its smooth side.

Each single painted piece can be appreciated, but it is when and how Parsons combines them that creates sheer magic. The works have a life of their own (most of the titles suggest themselves after the pieces are completed), but Betty's special light and vitality underline them all. Since 1947, Betty Parsons has provided a forum for America's art, but it is now time to recognize her own work. These constructions have individual character and freshness one almost never sees in today's art world. We must begin to celebrate their original and powerful spirit.

—Jill Dunbar

Three Artists

(Artworks, March 5-19) Lois Baron, J. Nebraska Gifford and Bibi Lencek shared this space, actually the studio of one of the artists turned into a gallery via a grant from the Committee for the Visual Arts. Baron showed two painted board cut-outs: one a down-filled vest, the other a pair of ski boots. The objects were painted in very strong, realistic colors, and their edges

faithfully followed the twists and turns of the originals. The boards were so thin as to cast virtually no shadow, which made them look like the colored areas of wall-sized paintings.

J. Nebraska Gifford's very large eight-figure drawing in Caran D'Ache crayon was a surprise for those of us acquainted with her abstract, cast latex wall works. Seven men and one little girl (the artist's daughter) are seen standing/bathing in a river surrounded by a sparse landscape. Most of the men, artists and writers, were depicted with their left arms upraised either waving or scrubbing their underarms. A statement by the artist noted similarities between artists and cowboys, and the communal river bathing was a cowboy milieu into which she inserted the creative persona.

Bibi Lencek's "Domestic Scenes" were paintings of two embracing figures. The semi-nude couple, in affectionate/sexual poses on a bed or platform covered with softly patterned fabrics, was painted in very, very soft, very pale colors that never seemed to have edges. The scenes looked as if they were in the haze of memory or dreams, and needed the punctuation of an occasional line or dark color.

Other shows have followed at Artworks, which has become an artist-determined showing space following in the steps of other decentralized, non-gallery sites.

—Ellen Lubell

Shirley Gorelick

(SOHO 20, January 8-February 2) Shirley Gorelick's latest show was dominated by powerful images of three sisters set in dense green tapestries of pachysandra and rhododendrons. The flabby teenagers who are the subject of her scrutiny are the products of leisurely, suburban living. They are posed in easy attitudes of abandon, haughty

directness and unabashed nakedness, staring straight on at the viewer or off to the sides. They are caught in spontaneous, intimate postures: hands on hips, sitting in conversation, fixing their hair. They are repeated with variations, sometimes lined up, sometimes cropped off as in candid photographs. (Gorelick works both from photos and from live models.) The artist has a firm control of complex formal structure. All the elements are realistically rendered; the individual leaves and deep shadows of the plants are strongly modeled. The figures are accomplished with close attention to the nuances of flesh tones as they pick up the colors of the outdoor surroundings, to the wrinkles of fatty limbs and to the separate facial expressions of the girls. Yet the plethora of greenery which envelops the figures holds them on the surface in a tense equilibrium. The repetition of the young women in a variety of poses and states of dress, peering off in different directions but never at each other (at themselves, as it were) arouses heavy psychological associations. They are linked together by formal and "family" resemblance, in their physical appearance and mental disposition, but they transmit a non-committal air—indifferent and even alienated—from the spectators outside their ambiance as well as from each other. Gorelick's paintings closely parallel the combination of formal skill and emotional intensity which make Degas the master of such work. Yet his feelings of repugnance toward women is completely missing from Gorelick's depictions and replaced with an understanding for her models' personalities, seen from outside their generation to be sure, but brimming with sympathetic comprehension for their situation.

Gorelick is also highly knowledgeable in the technique of silverpoint; there are several fine examples in the show. Her handling of line and contour is appropriately delicate in this medium, but sure and strong enough to create these gems of

portraiture. Frida Kahlo is the subject of a group of the silverpoints. She is obviously a personality Gorelick has studied and related to closely. This comes out most prominently in her monumental painting of Kahlo, Gorelick's contribution to the Sister Chapel. Its multiple symbology, towering presence and blazing color are sensitive interpretations of the spirit of the great Mexican artist Gorelick has chosen as her heroine.

—Barbara Cavaliere

Penny Kaplan

(14 Sculptors Gallery, March 12-30) Penny Kaplan's exhibit at 14 Sculptors consisted of models, drawings and photos of pieces of monumental sculpture she has built or proposes to build. It is therefore necessary to imagine this work on a much larger scale than what was shown.

Kaplan has found inspiration in ancient monuments. Most successful of her pieces was a circular sculpture based on an ancient temple in Naples. From a circle of columns inside a classical ruin, Kaplan develops flat shapes in a circle that form different levels and subdivide the circle in an intriguing manner. This seemed to really communicate a space to me. It was easy to imagine the possibilities of movement through it.

A large piece that had already been built seemed less attractive: a step pyramid unevenly broken down the center that lacked spatial excitement. It neither expanded nor contracted itself in space and therefore had a static quality that I think is inappropriate to a monument. There were also models of other pieces.

Kaplan's careful attention to these projects is admirable; she seems to be able to materialize her ideas, working them completely through.

—Robert Sievert

Four Artists

(Women in the Arts Gallery, March 19—April 16) Pat Ralph, Priscilla Press, Anna Bisso, Valerie Carmel were the four artists whose works were displayed simultaneously at the Women in the Arts Headquarters. Pat Ralph takes a sarcastic swat at Ingres in her series of *Bathers*, with groups of nudes luxuriating in (shades of modernity!) showers. Her paintings comment on the female body as an object for male speculation. In one group of women, oblivious to their audience (or just posed that way), one woman whose eye catches our own takes on the classic pose of temptress: seductively smiling, hand barely covering pubis. In another painting, this time of men, a man whose glance meets ours crouches in panic. Ralph captures his awkwardness with a painterly camera's click. In a series of three self-portraits (*Painters*) Ralph makes herself the victim of the voyeur.

Anna Bisso's constructions are each composed of a box affixed to a canvas. The boxes contain numerous autobiographical elements including watches, locks, keys and the letters of her name. Their contents spill over onto the larger painted surface, but the weight of each structure centers within the box. The attempted interplay between box and canvas plus Bisso's symbolic references suggest painful self-realizations about mortality.

Looking out from an upper-story window, Priscilla Press paints the streets of lower Manhattan. Buildings are built of rectangles, triangles and squares, all solid and stiff, and built plane upon plane like children's blocks. Everything is textureless and barren, from washed-out skies to the leaden East River. The city is ghostly, its structures like mausoleums.

Valerie Carmel derives her colors and forms from nature. Her paintings are charged with energy, the result of Carmel's keen eye for breaking tensions between



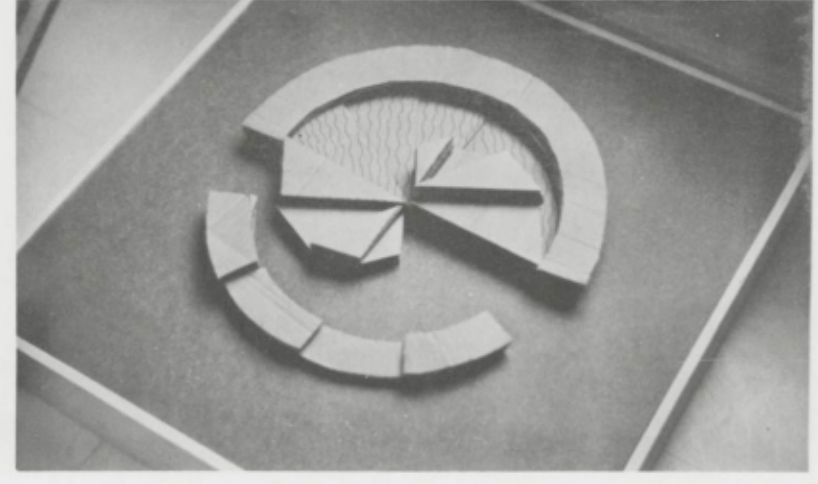
Betty Parsons, *On Wheels*, 1976. Painted wood construction, 21x15". Photo: Gwyn Metz.



Bibi Lencek, *Embrace with Peonies*. Oil on canvas, 40x62".



Shirley Gorelick, *Beth (profile)*, 1976. Silverpoint, 24x18".



Penny Kaplan, *Agora*. Corrugated cardboard, masonite, 16" diameter x 1 1/2".