

Sending up postcards from the edge

By David McCracken

Buzz Spector's obsession—not a perfume, but give the mushrooms under glass a few days—is postcards, around 10,000 of them from all over the world. Not content to simply file them away as a more routine collector would, for the past few years Spector has fashioned his two-dimensional art out of postcards; sanded down, tinted and otherwise manipulated, then grouped together, usually in a highly regimented manner.

Spector's exhibition at Roy Boyd Gallery through October concentrates on his recent postcard assemblages and also includes a few new and unusual three-dimensional works of blown glass, one of which partially encloses a batch of mushrooms. These glass pieces represent a change of pace for Spector, whose best-known sculptural works have been made up of stacks of books, his other collecting passion.

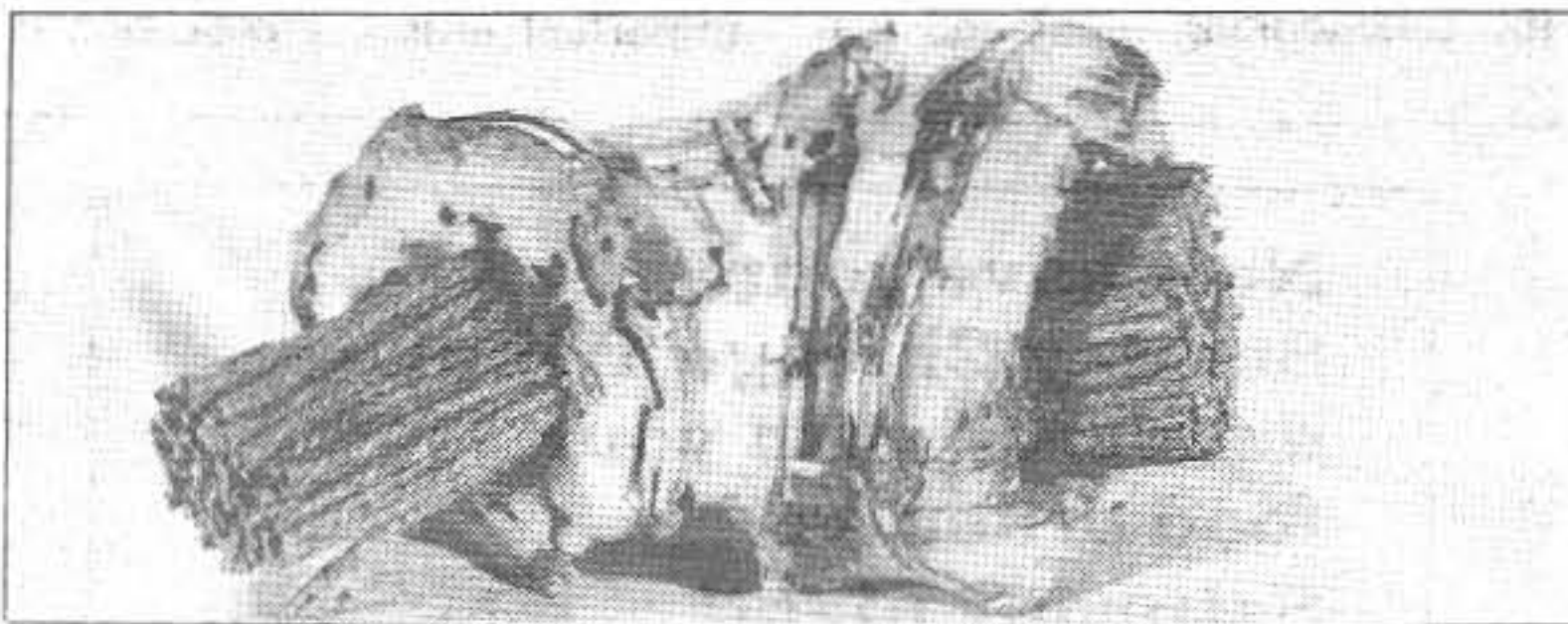
The postcards generate all sorts of associations, being found objects that are a kind of artwork in miniature: an image that is accompanied by a formal indentifying message as well as the sender's own commentary, interpretation and personal message.

Spector began using the cards in a strictly formal way, he said, but soon became interested in grouping them to form a narrative. These days, both formal play and narrative enter into the works, as in a topical piece such as "Columbus."

Spector calls it a rather "loopy" narrative, composed of images of ocean liners, a New World port and scenes of the street where Christopher Columbus was born.

"That's one of the most peculiar genres of postcards," he said, "because it commemorates the absent figure through a return to the site, and yet there's a kind of doubling which takes place, because a postcard isn't merely an image, it's a message sent to you from someone who is there. The absent figure is doubled: There's Columbus who is lost in history and there's your friend who sent you the card, who is absent but ennobled by the association with Columbus."

"And there's the formal aspect



"Prelude/Hybridation" by Dominique Morel

GALLERY SCENE

of these narrow streets that converge in the distant horizon line, a scene that's used often in postcards to connote destiny and questing."

A number of Spector's new works combine postcards with another sort of found image: anatomical illustrations on transparent paper, lifted from 19th Century anatomy texts. These are overlaid on the postcards, setting up patterns of interaction both compositional and narrative.

The illustrations, on a kind of transparent, waxed paper called glassine, remain remarkably fresh-looking, with deep colors that Spector pointed out were achieved in dangerous ways.

"The stuff they put in those inks is so poisonous you can't believe it," he said. "Lead, cyanide, strychnine—that's why the colors are so vivid, and why the color in old postcards stays vivid. I wear a mask and gloves when I sand those down."

As for the glass pieces, they arose from a visiting artist stint this summer at the Pilchuck School in Washington state, which specializes in art glass. He had intended to cast bookshelves in glass, but soon found that he cast off preconceptions and turned out works like "Bread No. 1" with mushrooms within a clear glass vessel.

"I meant for that little vessel with mushrooms to be fecund, and now it's on the edge of just being gross," said Spector. "I told the Boyds that if they want to let them rot that's OK with

me, but it's fine with me also if they want to change the mushrooms every week."

Buzz Spector's new works can be seen at 739 N. Wells St.

There's nothing in the least pretty about Dominique Morel's sculptures at Kay Garvey Gallery, yet they still exert a strange fascination. Made of fiberglass stretched over slatted ribs of bamboo (in some pieces, augmented by riveted aluminum armor), Morel's works suggest animal, vegetable and mineral materials and human artifice.

All her works are covered with a patina of brown oil pigment, wax and turpentine, which accent the outer shell's resemblance to preserved skins, or a kind of exoskeleton or rind. The best of her recent works have in common with their wall-mounted predecessors a sense of tension in the tight curves of the bamboo armature, which threatens to snap, or puncture the fiberglass membrane.

Earlier pieces also played a bit more with enclosing and revealing, as the skin only partially covered the frame. Most of the new works are completely covered and take the form of ovoids or sliced conical sections. A few have two or three parts which, though displayed separately, appear to fit together to form a larger entity, like organic plumbing fixtures.

One of the most interesting new works, "Prelude/Hybridation," is not hollow but reveals a central core of waxed sisal strands. Again, these suggest natural and artificial correlatives: wood pulp covered with bark, or guts, or even the bunched wires inside telephone cables.

Morel's new sculptures can be seen through Oct. 5 at 230 W. Superior St.

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