

THE WAR SHOW

Nancy Suttman, Mel Edwards, Mike Oler,
Gailly, Keena, Ben Sakoguchi, Nancy Soren,
and 12 Kids from the South Bronx



MARCH 22 - APRIL 29, 1993

GALLERY, FINE ARTS CENTER
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

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Although the 1945 atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred under American auspices, it set nationally swirling at the time as subject matter in American artists' work, considering the magnitude of the destruction and loss of life. Over the past 37 years information concerning the effects of the bomb has been relayed sporadically by means of published medical documents and the recent release of films captured immediately after the war. The acknowledgement of this data has catalyzed in a potent spurge of awareness and an incorporation of "nuclear conscious" images in a broad spectrum of artists' work. (Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat of nuclear weapons has been used twelve times including for example, in 1948, Berlin blockades (Truman); 1953, Korea (Eisenhower); 1958, Lebanon (Eisenhower); 1962, Cuban missile crisis (Kennedy); 1969, Siege of Kin Men (Johnson); 1969, 1972, Vietnam (Nixon); 1983, Middle East (Carter).)

Powerful and disturbing images of the Vietnam War brought directly into homes and studios by news media created a more immediate impact compounded by the reality of personal loss and bereavement. As a result of this more direct access to information, Vietnam imagery appeared more frequently in the past two decades as an ongoing motif.

The predominant theme in *The War Show* is the artists' attempt to deal with the concept of "radical evil."

"What crimes are of a certain magnitude and character, they nullify our power to respond to them adequately because they smash the humane context in which human issues normally acquire their meaning for us. When an entire community or all entire people is des-

The exhibition is guest curated by Howardena Pindell, Associate Professor, Art Department, S.U.N.Y. Stony Brook and member of the Stony Brook Art Gallery Advisory Committee, to whom special thanks are deserved for her professional expertise in developing the exhibition and for contributing the catalogue essay.

All of the participating artists are gratefully acknowledged for their helpful cooperation and loans to the exhibition. Thanks are due to Ronald Feldman and Lynn Cassaniti of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, for their assistance and generous loans, as well as to Geno Rodriguez, Alternative Museum, New York, Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, for their assistance with needed information, photographs, and loans.

Lynne Silkman
Acting Director

Cover design: Mike Glier, 1983
Frontispiece: Nancy Spero, *Female Bomb*, 1966

Methods of making a choice through combat, a "decision by arms",¹ have evolved from hand-to-hand, spear, stone, sword and arrow skirmishes to more anonymous assaults on humanity by technologically exotic weaponry. Humankind has moved from the ability to annihilate individual members of the species to the capability of rendering the planet earth null and void, a death relayed by micro chips and delivered by multiple nuclear warheads. As death-by-remote control arsenals have developed, the individual "opponent" has withdrawn from the direct view of the consequences of the blow delivered. The eye-to-eye contact of centuries past has given way to viewing potential victims as target data on a viewing screen.

Assault from the air represents one of the broadest leaps into detachment of the opponent from combatant, or opponent from civilian casualty. (The first aerial assault was made by hot air balloons over Venice in 1849 by Austrian Lieutenant Franz Ucha-tius²). Attack from the air did not take on its apocalyptic aspects until a more "reliable" method of flight was developed in 1903 by Orville and Wilber Wright. Warning of potential negative uses of flight appeared in the "science fiction" of Jules Verne, *Clipper of the Clouds* (1873), Albert Robida's *War in the 20th Century* (1883) and H. G. Wells' *War in the Air* (1908)³.

Although the first (1899) and second (1907) Hague Peace Conferences attempted to pass resolutions to stop the use of aerial attack, the requests for a permanent ban were defeated.

"Like a kind hearted executioner, the bomb permitted its perspective victims to go on living seemingly ordinary lives up to the day that the execution should suddenly and without warning be carried out."⁴

Artists have been on both sides of the war issue either romanticizing or idealizing military exploits for their patrons or condemning the carnage as did Francisco Goya (1746-1828) in his *Disasters of War* etchings (1818-1823). Italian Futurists⁵ extolled war and militarism whereas powerful visual statements against its horrors for both combatant and civilian were made by Otto Dix (1891-1969), Kathe Kollwitz (1861-1945) and George Grosz (1893-1959). Ironically, they were born in Germany, one of the leading countries in pursuit of increasingly more destructive armament during the 19th and 20th centuries. Although protest images were not the central core of Picasso's work, *Guernica* was created as a protest of the saturation bombing in 1937 of Guernica, an historic former Basque capital.

Although the 1945 atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred under American auspices, it was curiously missing at the time as subject matter in American artists' work, considering the magnitude of the destruction and loss of life. Over the past 37 years information concerning the effects of the bomb has been relayed sporadically by means of published medical documents and the recent release of films censored immediately after the war. The acknowledgement of this data has coalesced in a potent upsurge of awareness and an incorporation of "nuclear conscious" images in a broad spectrum of artists' work.⁶ (Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat of nuclear weapons has been used twelve times including for example: in 1948, Berlin blockade (Truman); 1953, Korea (Eisenhower); 1958, Lebanon (Eisenhower); 1962, Cuban missile crises (Kennedy); 1968, Siege of Khe San (Johnson); 1969, 1972, Vietnam (Nixon); 1980, Middle East (Carter).⁷

Powerful and disturbing images of the Vietnam War brought directly into home and studio by news media created a more immediate impact compounded by the reality of personal loss and bereavement. As a result of this more direct access to information, Vietnam imagery appeared more frequently in the same time frame as on going events.

The predominant theme in *The War Show* is the artists' attempt to deal with the concept of "radical evil."

"When crimes are of a certain magnitude and character, they nullify our power to respond to them adequately because they smash the human context in which human losses normally acquire their meaning for us. When an entire community or an entire people is destroyed, most of those who would mourn the victims, or bring the perpetrators to justice, or forgive them, or simply remember what occurred, are themselves destroyed."⁸

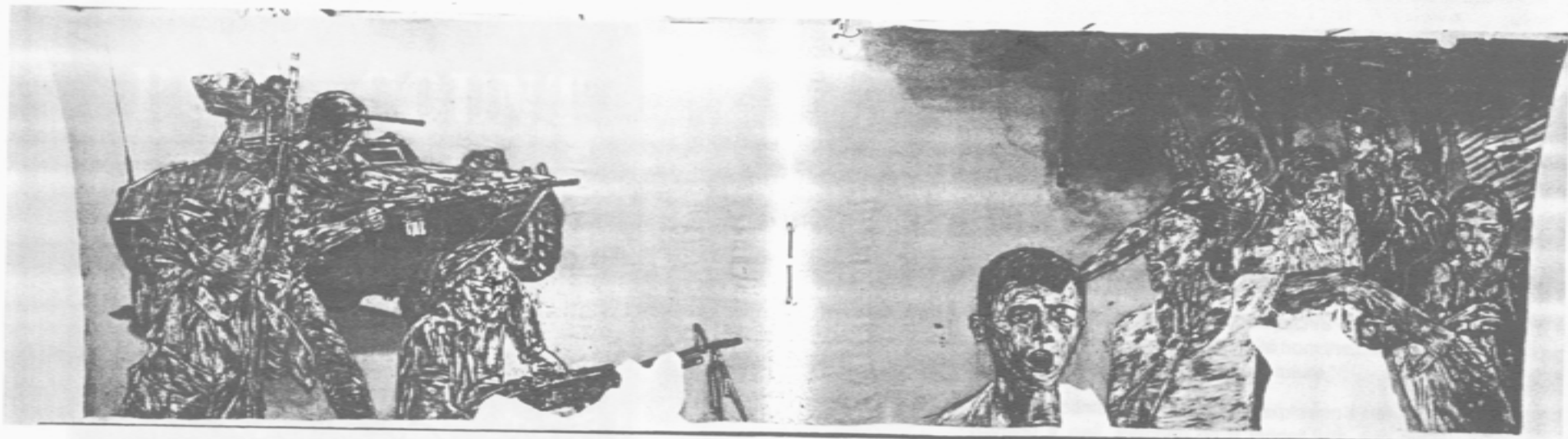
Tragic aspects of the war in Vietnam are examined by Leon Golub in "*Vietnam*" II and Ben Sakoguchi in his orange crate label series. Golub overwhelms us with the sheer scale of his image, a metaphor for the overpowering magnitude of the events which seemed to escalate and unravel unchecked. Using unstretched canvases, itself a coarse, taut, and rent surface, the image of targeted civilian and aggressor appear; the unarmed desperate, fragile victim confronted by the brutally indifferent uniformed infantry equipped with the latest killing apparatus. Culled from news photo sources, the images have the anonym-



Otto Dix. *The War. 1/3: Gassed. Templeux-Le-Fosse, August 1916, 1924.* Etching, 7 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. (159.34.3)

...the images do not ...

...the artist's massive wall painting and drawing conveys dramatically that each of us is responsible for permitting the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as controlling their use. Gler's images seem to arise from a cinematic wide-screen, larger-than-life view of the world, creating a rapidly transmitted image with "punch" of a billboard message. While Gler's works have a strangely contemplative, meditative quality through the urgent poetry of a savage yet measured "calligraphic" brushstroke. Gler's application of form and line gives us a sense of time suspended as the different sensibility to time of an artist born into a generation whose life has from birth been under the threat of extinction can be seen therefore in contrast in the past generations' sensibility to time having not yet come before the necessity to have the memory of what it was like without "the bomb."



Leon Golub, "Vietnam" II, 1973

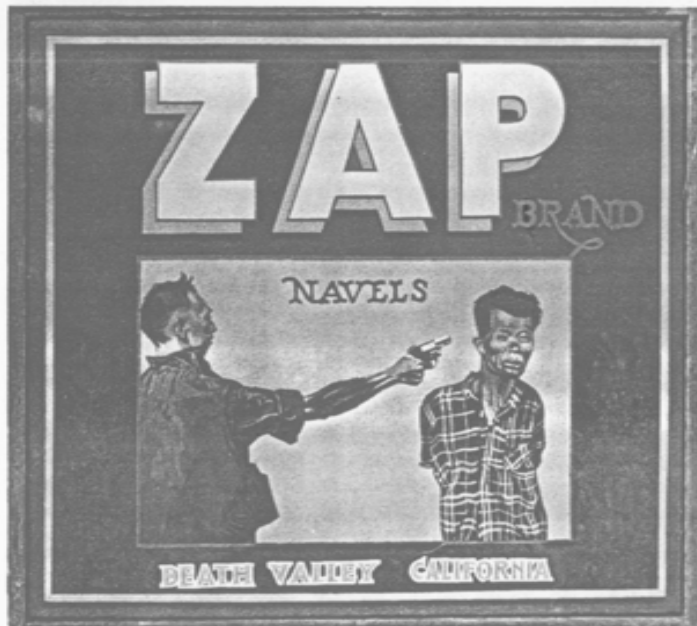
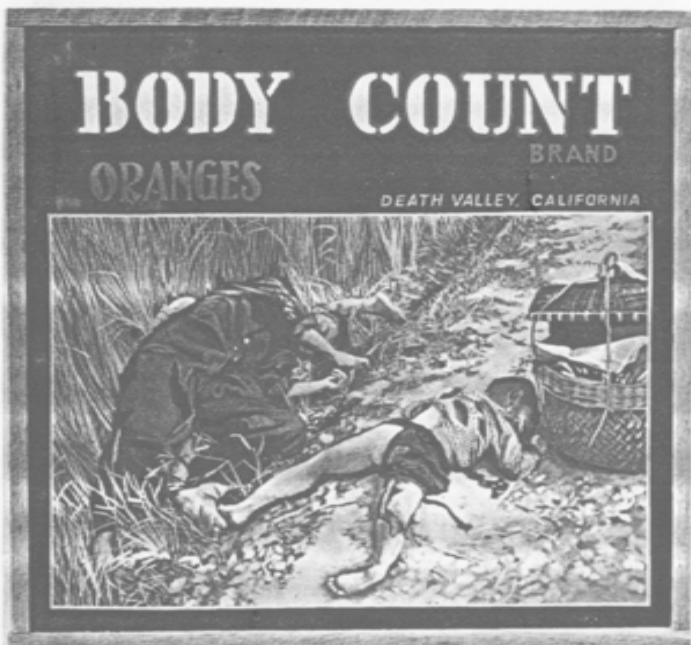
ous, remote, grainy quality of a re-transmitted photograph depicting an event which is in the process of unfolding. The horror is heightened by the enlarged image of a screaming child, a spectre which recurs throughout the exhibition in the work of Sakoguchi and Jerry Kearns. Sakoguchi turns "radical evil" in on itself creating a grisly "humor," by using standard military and media jargon and images as insignias for macabre Californian orange crate labels. Size has been reduced to the densely packed format of a label; interrogation and death depicted by a slick slogan and packaged product.

A nuclear bomb, "radical evil" at its most extreme, is depicted in its various aspects by Nancy Buchanan, Mike Glier, Nancy Spero, Mel Edwards, Jerry Kearns and school children from the South Bronx.

Nancy Buchanan, a performance artist, reveals in *Fallout from a Nuclear Family* her struggle to deal with an inner conflict of "responsibility" as the result of having a person who is part of the "military power structure" within the family. Through a series of 10 unique book works she unfolds a portrait of her father, Louis N. Ridenour, Jr., (1911-1959), a nuclear physicist who was Chief Scientist for the Air Force and head of a branch of Lockheed. Buchanan states, "... Because of the position he held (often consulting on defense matters), I (also) hoped the piece could be seen as a 'portrait' of social forces operating during the growth of the cold war."⁹

Nancy Spero, whose use of the bomb theme emerged in the 1960's, addresses the ferocious sexuality of aggressive total destruction creating a malevolent archetypal A-bomb image. Monstrous forms of the bomb intertwine and spew forth his/her victims echoing Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* (1821-1822). The bomb is depicted by Spero as the ultimate destructive force from which there is no escape once it is unleashed. She has stated that the sexuality of military aggression can be heard in the bombardiers' use of loaded slang metaphors for dropping bombs on targets, often spoken in terms of "delivery," or "dropping a load," etc. Spero's images do not absolve from responsibility one gender over another.

Mike Glier's massive wall painting and drawing conveys dramatically that each of us is responsible for permitting the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as preventing their use. Glier's images seem to arise from a cinematic wide-screen, larger-than-life, view of the world, creating a rapidly transmitted image with "punch" of a billboard message. While Spero's works have a strangely contemplative, meditative quality through the urgent poetry of a savage yet measured "calligraphic" brushed line, Glier's application of form and line gives us a sense of time speeded up. The different sensitivity to time of an artist born into a generation whose life has from birth been under the threat of extinction can be seen therefore in contrast to the past generations' sensitivity to time having been born before the necessity to have the memory of what it was like without "the bomb."



Mel Edward's *Imagination*, a sculpture installation, gives us the "aftermath," the remnants of mankind stripped to its bare frame. Barbed wire, with its "long history in war of obstacle and enclosure"¹⁰, steel, and bone, form figures that stand as stark reminders of the fragility of human flesh against the unleashed power of cosmic forces.

Jerry Kearns' wall installation of graphite and conte crayon figures brings us back full circle to contemplate the cause and the effect of our actions. Shadows of children playing war games with mock guns march across the wall in the presence of the shadow of a screaming child. The image of the screaming child, which appears in Kearns', Golub's and Sakoguchi's work, seems to represent the dire warnings of the "child from the past, [admonishing us about] the implications for our future."¹¹

"At the epicenter of the Hiroshima explosion a man was painting a wall. Perched on a ladder with arm outstretched he disintegrated. Like a comic strip figure who has been hurled through bricks, his outline was imprinted on the wall. The silhouette remains. The man was severed from his shadow as the atom was split."¹²

The children's work included in this exhibition, *Hypo-Center South Bronx*, was executed as a collaboration project organized by artist Tim Rollins. Each child, after reading Hiroshima survivors' accounts in *Unforgettable Fire*, was asked to create an image relating what he or she had read to the possible consequences of an atom-bomb being dropped on the South Bronx.

Utilizing varying points of view and mode of execution, representatives from several generations of artists are in his or her way contemplating the tragic consequences of our past, present and future actions as nuclear war seems an approaching possibility.

"Because the weight of extinction, like the weight of mortality, bears down on life through the mind and spirit but otherwise, until the event occurs, leaves us physically undisturbed, no one can prove that it alters the way we live . . . Since the future generations are specifically what is at stake, all human activities that assume the future are undermined directly."¹³

"Indeed if we admit the reality of the basic terms of nuclear predicament — that present levels of global armament are great enough to possibly extinguish the species if a holocaust should occur; that in extinction every human purpose would be lost; that because once the species has been extinguished there will be no second chance . . ."¹⁴

Installation: 1983, 12 x 12 feet

1982, 1983

West Northport, New York, 1982, *Revisited in New York*

My Own's Responsibility But My Own HOWARDENA PINDELL

Installation: 1983, 12 x 12 feet

1983, 1984

East Chicago, Indiana, 1983, *Revisited in New York City*

"The World" in 1973

Acrylic, 120 x 480 inches

Chauncey Susan Coburn Gallery, New York

1983, 1984

East Passaic, New Jersey, 1984, *Revisited in New York City*

Between Light and Shadow, 1982

Installation: Acrylic, 120 x 480 inches, 12 x 12 feet

1983, 1984

East San Francisco, California, 1983, *Revisited in Pasadena, California*

The Shaping works are acrylic, 120 x 480 inches

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

1983, 1984

NOTES:

1. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*. New York, Avon Books, 1982, p. 190.
2. Lee Kennet, *A History of Strategic Bombing*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982, p. 6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
4. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*. New York, Avon Books, 1982, p. 150.
5. The Museum of Modern Art, *The Artist as Adversary*, exhibition catalog, Text by Betsy Jones, New York, 1971, p. 5.
6. Over the past 12 months there have been a number of exhibitions in response to artists articulating their fears about war and the potential for a nuclear annihilation: *Visual Politics*, Alternative Museum, New York; *War Games*, and *The Atomic Salon* (in collaboration with *Village Voice*), Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; *Decision by Arms*, Just Above Midtown/Downtown, New York; *The War Room*, Gallery 345, New York (travelling exhibition); and *Dangerous Works*, Parsons School of Design, New York.
7. "Sadistic Ballistics," *Village Voice*, by Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, (June 15, 1982) p.4.
8. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*. New York, Avon Books, 1982, p. 145.
9. Nancy Buchanan, (statement), *War Games* (press release), Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1982.
10. Melvin Edwards, (statement), *Works* (exhibition brochure), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1970.
11. Jerry Kearns, taped telephone interview, February 21, 1983.
12. "Eikoh Hosoe and Yukio Mishima: The Shadow in the Time Machine," *Artforum*, by Mark Holborn, (February 1983), p. 51.
13. Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*. New York, Avon Books, 1982, p. 155.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 218-219.



Jerry Kearns. Working drawing for *Between Light and Shadow*, installation Fine Arts Center Art Gallery, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1983.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works are on loan from the artists unless otherwise indicated.

NANCY BUCHANAN

Born Boston, Massachusetts, 1946. Resides in Madison, Wisconsin.

Fallout from the Nuclear Family, 1980

10 books, 18 photographs

Books: 9 x 12 inches (variable) Photographs: 10 x 12 inches

Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

MEL EDWARDS

Born Houston, Texas, 1937. Resides in New Jersey.

Imagination, 1983

Installation: Steel, 12 x 18 feet

MIKE GLIER

Born Northern Kentucky, 1953. Resides in New York City.

No One's Responsibility But My Own, 1983

Installation: Chalk and latex paint, 23 x 47 feet

LEON GOLUB

Born Chicago, Illinois, 1922. Resides in New York City.

"Vietnam" II, 1973

Acrylic, 120 x 480 inches

Courtesy Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York

JERRY KEARNS

Born Petersburg, West Virginia, 1944. Resides in New York City.

Between Light and Shadow, 1983

Installation: Acrylic, conte crayon, graphite, 12 x 40 feet

BEN SAKOGUCHI

Born San Bernardino, California, 1938. Resides in Pasadena, California.

The following works are acrylic on canvas, 10 x 11 inches:

Waste-'Em, 1977

M-16, 1979

Interrogation, 1979

Acceptable Kill Ratio, 1979

K.I.A., 1979

Napalm, 1979

Body Count, 1979

Zap, 1979

Self-Defense, 1982

Liberty, 1982

NANCY SPERO

Born Cleveland, Ohio, 1926. Resides in New York City.

The following works are gouache and ink on paper:

Bomb, Canopie Jar, Victims, 1966, 27 1/4 x 33 1/4 inches

Bomb Proliferation, 1966, 33 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches

Bomb Shitting, 1966, 33 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches

Bomb & Victims, 1966, 33 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches

Female Bomb, 1966, 33 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches

Female Bomb, 1966, 35 1/4 x 23 1/4 inches

Female Bomb, Victims, 1966, 33 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches

Male Bomb, 1966, 23 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches

Sperm Bomb, 1966, 27 1/4 x 33 1/4 inches

Bomb & Victim in Individual Bomb Shelter, 1967, 23 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches

Female Bomb, 1967, 23 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches

Male Bomb, 1968, 35 1/4 x 23 1/4 inches

Victims and Helicopter, 1968, 35 1/4 x 24 inches

TIM ROLLINS and 12 Kids from the South Bronx:

Christina Marie Argula, age 13; Adalberto Badillo, age 13; Felix Cepero, age 13;

Angel Gonzalez, age 14; Michael John Gonzalez, age 14; Malloy Nesmith, age 13;

Leonard Rahming, age 14; Kelvin Roberts, age 14; Adelaida Santiago, age 13;

Roberto Santiago, age 12; Juan Soto, age 14; Juanita Watson, age 14.

Hypocenter: South Bronx, 1982

Tempera and pencil on paper, 18 x 24 inches each (installed 10 x 10 feet)

Courtesy Group Material / Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Tim Rollins / Michael Gonzalez (age 14) *Hypocenter: South Bronx*, 1982

Photo Credit: Andre Serrano

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975 FACULTY EXHIBITION
1976 MICHELLE STUART
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
SALVATORE ROMANO
1977 MEL PEKARSKY
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
1978 LEON GOLUB
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
JANET FISH
ROSEMARY MAYER
THE SISTER CHAPEL
1979 SHIRLEY GORELICK
ALAN SONFIST
HOWARDENA PINDELL
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
1980 BENNY ANDREWS
ALEX KATZ
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
OTTO PIENE
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
1981 ALICE NEEL
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
JOHN LITTLE
IRA JOEL HABER
LEON POLK SMITH
1982 FOUR SCULPTORS
CECILE ABISH
JACK YOUNGERMAN
ALAN SHIELDS
THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
ANN MCCOY

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

THE FINE ARTS CENTER

 art gallery