

# Sunday Star-Ledger

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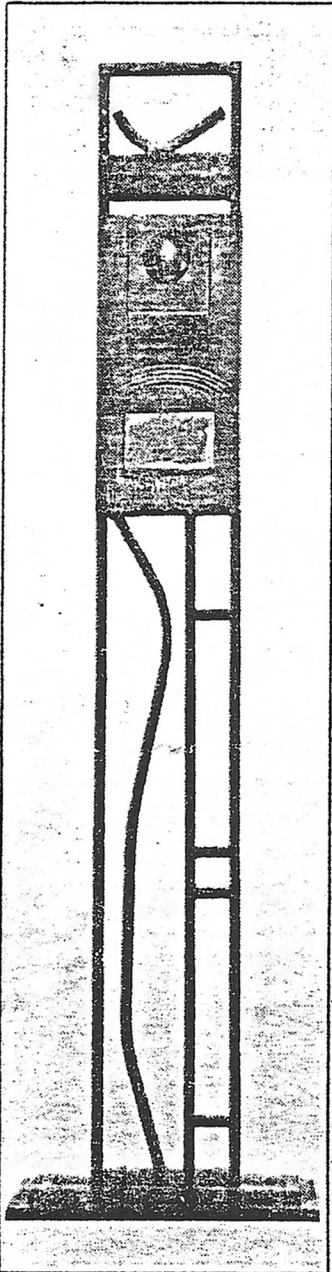
THE NEWSPAPER FOR NEW JERSEY

APRIL 30, 1995

ART

By Eileen Watkins

## Hunterdon Center focuses on true partnerships



Jim Taylor shows his bronze-and-steel sculpture 'Guard Figure' at the Hunterdon Art Center, Clinton

The idea of a master sculptor working with an apprentice may sound like something out of the Renaissance, but such relationships continue today.

Through May 14, an exhibit that pairs works by well-established artists and their lesser-known assistants can be seen at the Hunterdon Art Center, Clinton. Trenton sculptor Peter Vanni has curated "Sculptural Cross Sections: Productive Partners."

He notes that the show does not mean to demonstrate the influence of one sculptor upon the other. "Sometimes this ends up reflecting in both artists' bodies of work," he says, "or not."

An assistant may work in the studio of the "senior" artist, or in a foundry. His or her contribution may involve helping with figure modeling, metal work or patination.

Well-known sculptor Isaac Witkin is quoted as saying that using an assistant "has caused me to be more direct and spontaneous, as I am ever conscious of someone standing around waiting for me to react before he can play his part."

Witkin shows two surrealistic bronzes. "Ten of Wands" consists of flattened, vertical bone-shapes that lean together in a cluster; "Bisti" suggests an eerie, volcanic island, with four jagged spires reaching upward.

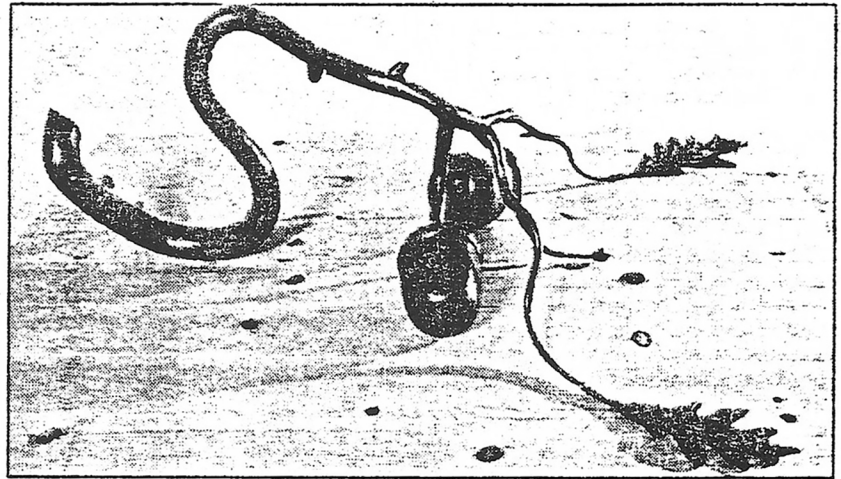
Joseph Howard has collaborated with Witkin for well over a decade. He states, "Some things I have learned: artistic integrity, perseverance, self-awareness, openness to the unknown, optimism in the face of adversity."

Howard displays his huge aluminum "Wheel Piece," surrealistic in its own way. A long axle passes through a spoked wheel at one end, a solid disc at the other. Three limp, biomorphic pieces drape over the axle at the center.

Master ceramicist Toshiko Takaezu exhibits her stoneware piece "Ka-Hua (Egg)," a massive, oval pod streaked in browns. She explains the ways in which Jim Taylor assists her: "I create the pieces and the wax models, which he then casts in bronze and finishes at the Johnson Atelier (in Mercerville)."

Taylor's "Guard Figure," an abstract, rectangular pillar that contains linear, geometric designs, at first seems quite opposite from Takaezu's images. Taylor can see similarities, however. He says, "Toshiko's work validated the accidental, minimal and meditative notions in my work."

Both Joel Shapiro and his assistant Patrick Strzelec exhibit untitled pieces in bronze. Shapiro offers a brick-sized box that appears to slant into the floor, as if falling through or emerging from it. Strzelec shows what could be an abstracted bust, a hollow hive from which a fist-sized shape thrusts upward.



The exhibit 'Sculptural Cross Sections' includes the bronze 'Cider Witch' by John Franklin

The two offer a joint statement: "We have worked closely together for the past 15 years and, during that time, have developed a complex relationship as artists and friends."

Pop artist Claes Oldenburg contributes his assemblage "Leaf Boat with Floating Cargo, Model." On a kind of miniature stage, a piece of gray cardboard becomes a boat with a leaf sail, surrounded by an apple core, a cork, a peanut shell and a potato chip.

Oldenburg, however, is also known for enlarging everyday objects for droll effects. His assistant John Franklin borrows this concept for his bronze "Cider Witch," an oversized branch with two acorns and two oak leaves, which resembles a bowing figure. Concerning Oldenburg, he notes, "We completely independently chose works that include the image of a leaf."

Grace Knowlton exhibits a large, untitled sphere in welded steel and copper. The various metals look patched together, in a crude armor, and the viewer can glimpse the hollow interior.

Knowlton's helper Martine Kaczynski shows a plaid suit bag, unzipped and formally mounted on a low bench; with its overtones of a coffin, it conveys a Dadaist humor. Although the two works seem quite different in approach and materials, Kaczynski points out both she and her mentor are concerned with "the notion of containment and protection."

Architect and designer Michael Graves gives us "three large archaic vessels," lead crystal bowls and urns in the style of early Roman pieces, resting on footed bronze stands. Graves' assistant Le Corbeau,

on the other hand, offers a completely abstract sculpture, "The Wanderer." Carved in wood and covered with gold leaf, the long form twists at the center like a propeller blade. Both artisans obviously take a strong interest in sleek shapes.

Master craftsman David Howell presents "Revoiver," a tapering cabinet of speckled rewareware wood, lined in aluminum. His protege Jay Gibson gives us a black walnut table, the top resembling an oval shield with a silvery design, the cast aluminum legs modeled on antelope horns.

During the same period, the Art Center also showcases paintings and drawings by Barbara Klein of Lawrenceville.

Process dominates in Klein's works, leaving the viewer to puzzle out his own meanings. Working in oil, encaustic and other media, she builds up layers of deep earth tones. The surfaces mottle, crack and streak as if weathered by the elements over time.

Two symbols recur often, the cross-shape and the circle. Klein arranges four square panels to create works such as her "Black and White Cruciform," in which a few pale orbs rise through the murky atmosphere. With their long, brownish drips, her cruciform works merely hint at violence. The references become more overt in her "Quartet" oils, which incorporate bull's-eyes washed in rusty reds. Scarlet dots like bloody fingerprints meander through her "Spots" series.

"About Yellow" is a grid of 20 rectangles in which orbs and target designs drift in and out of moody backgrounds, textured with intense shades of yellow, red, green, brown and black.