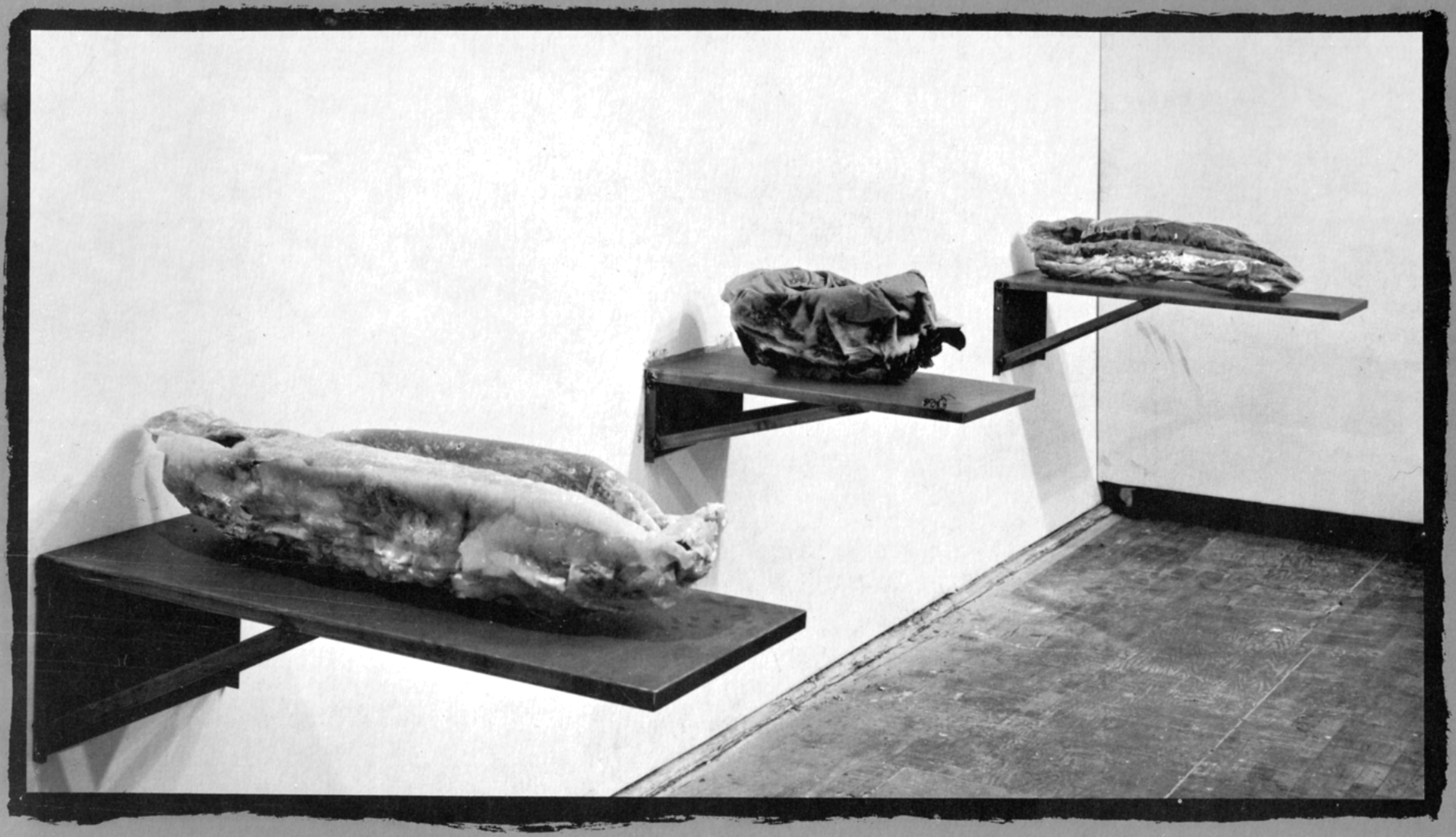


Nomadic Visions

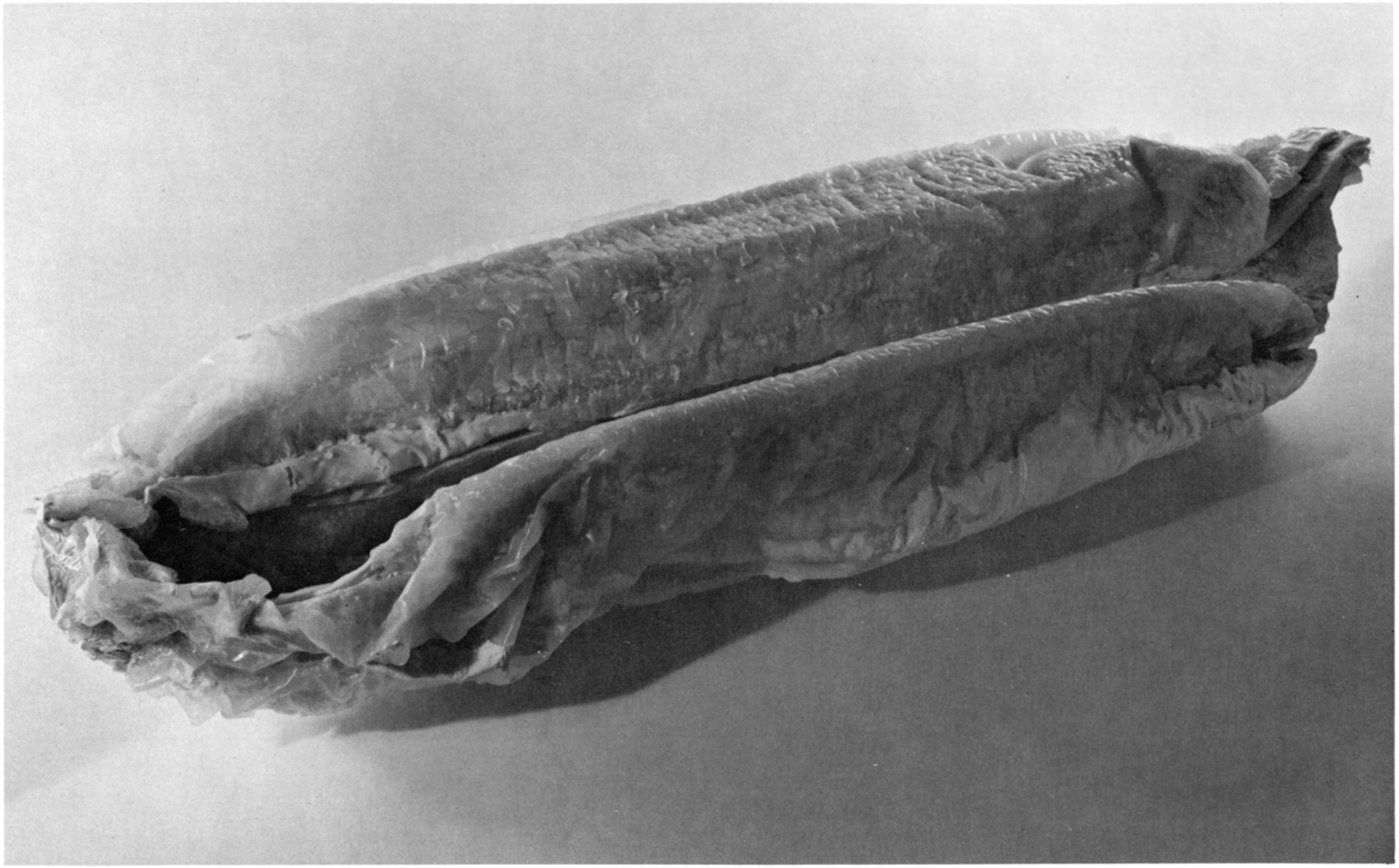
January 25—February 19, 1988

Nomadic Visions

Recent Work by Six New York Sculptors

Maureen Connor
Petah Coyne
Ellen Driscoll
Carol Hepper
Creighton Michael
Elise Siegel

Curated by Lasse Antonsen



Styx, 1986
Wax plaster, cloth
40x11x11 inches
Collection of the artist

Maureen Connor

The morning when with Her you struggled among the glitterings of snow, those green lips, those glaciers, black banners and blue beams, and the purple perfumes of the polar sun. —Your strength.

Arthur Rimbaud
Illuminations

Floating Island is a withdrawal to freedom. It tells the story of those who had the strength to leave the safety of terra firma in order to remain true to their own desires.

Vehicles of passage, *Charon*, *Styx* and *Swell*, are sensuous manifestations of death transcended, of the personal absorbed into the dream. Made out of plaster, wax and cloth, the work evokes an unsettling reaction—a kind of tactile shortcircuiting—which on a physical level both invites and resists, but on a spiritual—erotic level lifts one towards a blinding excitement accompanied by loss.

Elise Siegel

"The only way to stay awake is to become a bird or a cricket, or something of the sort," he said.

"How do you do that, Don Juan?"

"That is what I am teaching you. Do you remember what I said to you yesterday while you were without your body?"

"I can't recall clearly."

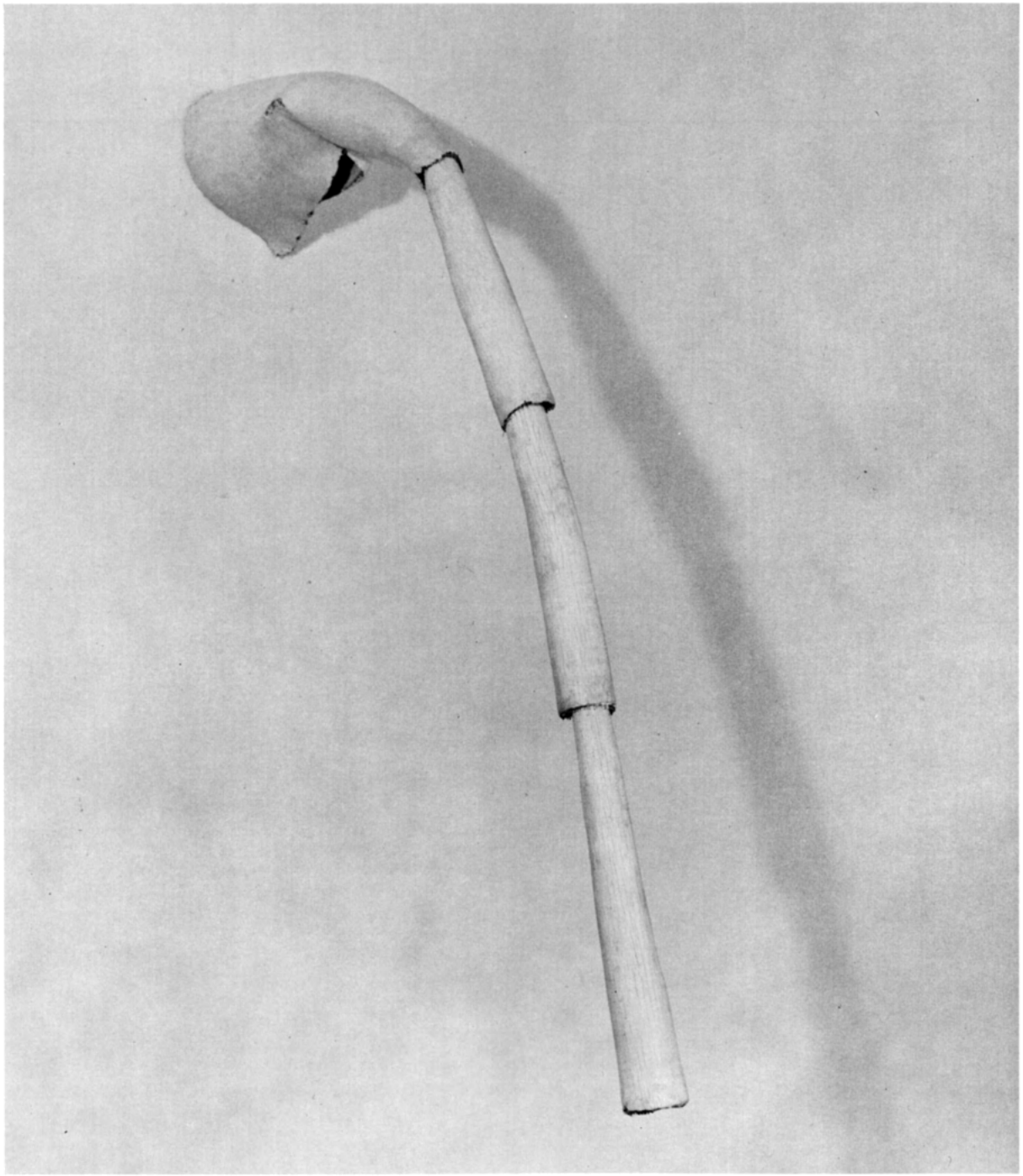
"I am a crow. I am teaching you how to become a crow. When you learn that, you will stay awake, and you will move freely . . ."

Carlos Castaneda
The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge

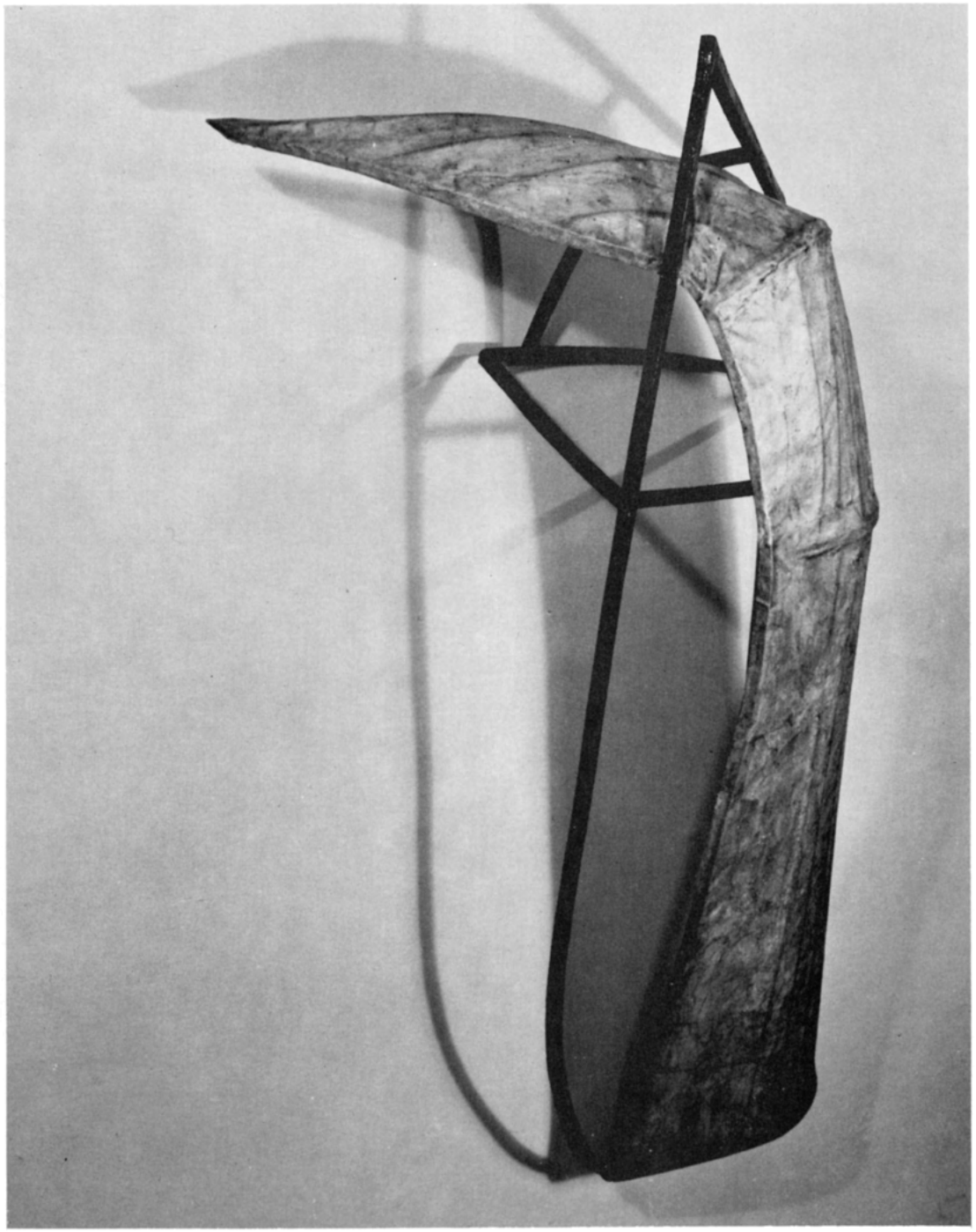
In the passage into "dream time"—the magical passage into the twilight area between day and night—Man reenters his "forgotten" animal consciousness. In the process, Man's dream body merges with the vast time structure of Nature's Great Laboratory. The result is acute sensing.

It is this existence in "living time" that Elise Siegel's work visualizes. Her sculptures are constructed of wire mesh coated with acrylic modeling paste, with a smooth surface into which color has been rubbed. Works such as *Offering* and *Ochre Reach* jut out horizontally like heads, and then gently reach toward the ground. They are like beings who have entered from a world (the wall) unknown to us, and now manifest—without eyes, without obvious sense organs—a gentle, beckoning, almost frightening, awareness.

As messengers, or "allies," they are both known and unknown, forgotten and available. They are beings that "see."



Ochre Reach, 1986
Wire mesh, acrylic modeling paste
6x8x56 inches
Collection of the artist



Auk, 1987
Wood, paper, fiberglass, wax
51¼x36x20 inches
Collection of the artist

Creighton Michael

Hundreds of metallic-blue dragon flies were positioned over the ice-cold, downward rushing water. Their bodies pointed upstream, and a blind, collective instinct seemed to force them still closer to the surface. Long green leaves reaching up from the bottom were forced into a horizontal position, and as the insects landed, they slowly became submerged. Lines of transparent wings could be seen in the water where the dragon flies remained immobile, as if frozen.

L.A.

Nature's cyclical movement launches, in the world of insects, complex stages of transformation, leading one level of consciousness toward another, and one manifestation of matter into another.

Creighton Michael's work documents this transformation at the same time as it indicates the instincts that make it possible. His work is approachable, yet elusive. The open gesture, the defined surface and the urge to unfold are countered by the desire to enclose and retract.

Constructed of painted wood and fiberglass coated paper, Michael's work—unlike Elise Siegel's—does not rely on an interior, animal consciousness. Rather, his sculptures reveal the movement of skeletal structure and a breathing surface, and rely almost exclusively on these element's combined ability to manifest intent.

Shell 8 reminds us that each single insect is the manifestation of all others like it, a participant in a collective, secret consciousness.

Petah Coyne

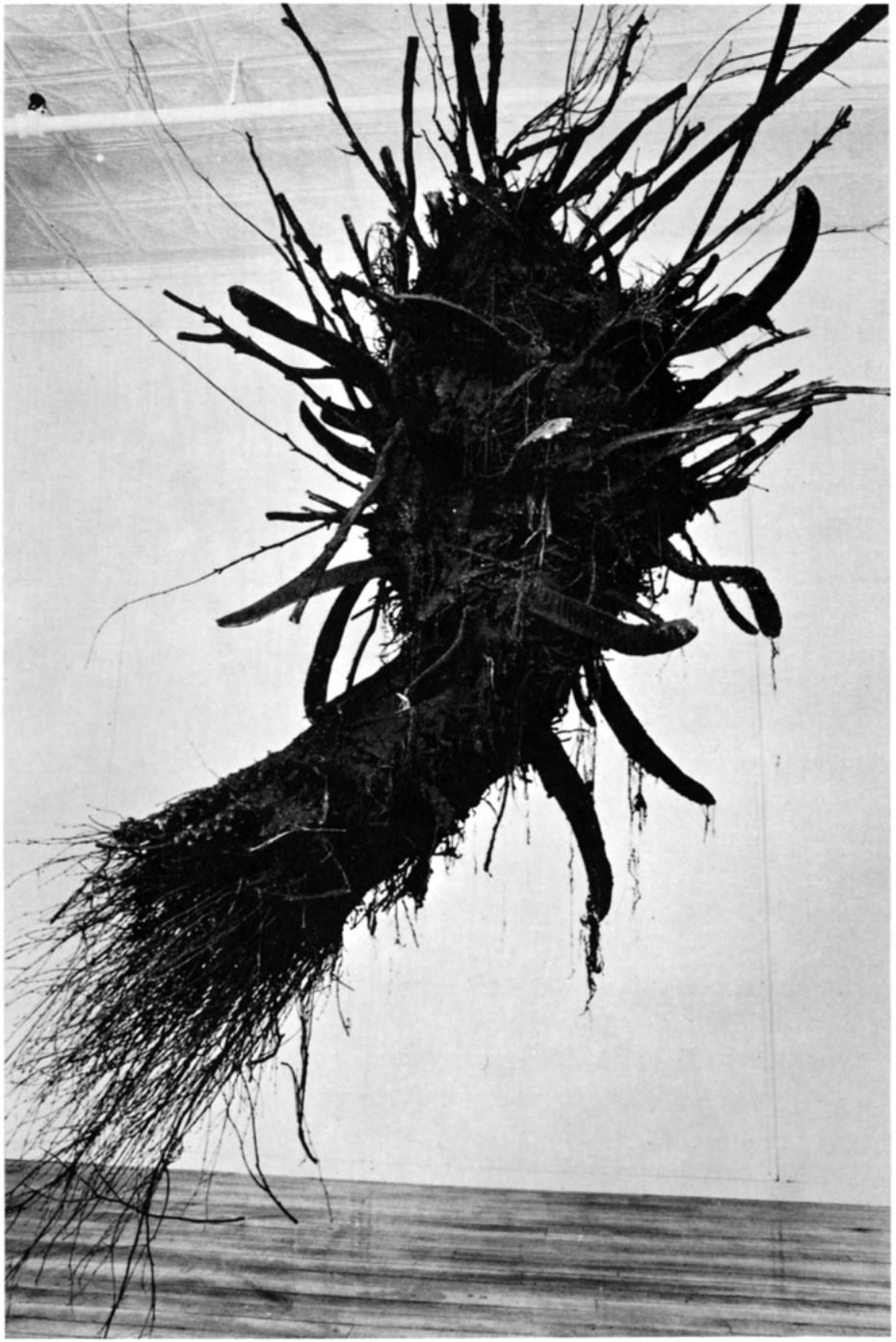
When a poet tells me that he "knows a type of sadness that smells of pineapple" I myself feel less sad, I feel gently sad.

Gaston Bachelard
The Poetics of Space

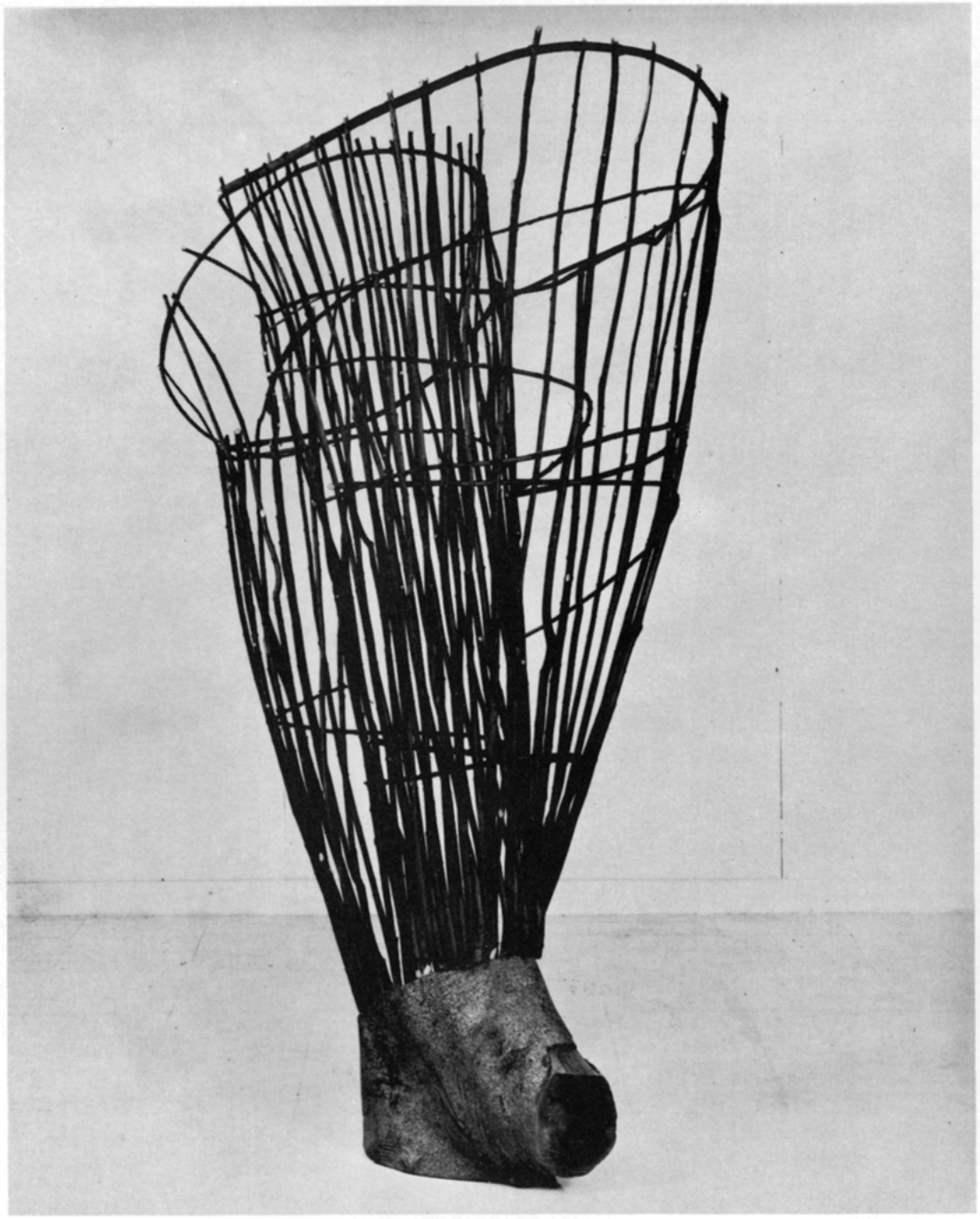
Projected secrecy and a desire for transformation act together in Petah Coyne's work. Created of natural materials such as roots, soil and branches, Coyne's sculptures have a presence that make them look found and unchanged. Yet they tell an unsettling story of encapsulated events—events that make the work appear dark, sad, or indifferent.

They represent an inpenetrable, symbiotic relationship which forces us to recognize the inherent cruelty in nature, reminiscent of how certain parasitic insects deposit their eggs inside the cells of plants, forcing the plant to nourish the growing larva, slowly incapsulating it and providing it with protection during its final transformation into an insect—an event which often takes place long after the plant itself has died.

But the ritualistic elements in Coyne's work are strong too, and we need to recall how Coyne in her early work obsessively embalmed dead fish in an attempt to make them participants in the divine.



Untitled, 1986
132x60x72 inches
Collection of the artist



Tropus, 1987
Wood, wire, pigment
79x47x47 inches
Collection of Dr. Shelley Kolton
and Maureen Klehe

Carol Hepper

Words and their meanings are animated by currents of energy, which none of us firmly controls. Some words seem to float weightless above and foreign to our thoughts, like a distant frigate bird riding the high air. Then, in an unforeseen moment, one descends upon us, though we can only surmise why or whence it has come and whither it is heading.

Richard R. Niebuhr
Pilgrims and Pioneers

Constructed out of branches and fish skin, *Liquid Embrace III*, surges upward and out with a flame—like energy, visualizing a process of both becoming and consuming, manifesting and dissolving.

Carol Hepper's works act as metaphors for shelter, but are also manifestations of living time. Like nomadic songs, her sculptures are born out of ecstasy; they ask guidance while remaining independent and proud.

Carol Hepper's recent work sets up situations of great inner complexity and seemingly contradictory statements, as in Tropus, which somehow, in its enigmatic presence convinces us of its rightness, its truth. The work has become, in its own way, a guide for the formulation of new thought.

Ellen Driscoll

Medieval travel books contain many stories of a frankly allegorical nature. Some stories have themselves traveled for centuries. One is of a mountain, Athos, "totally windless and free of rain" with air "so dry that breathing is possible only through a damp sponge." Vincent of Beauvais gives a description of this place in which he speaks of "philosophers who climbed the mountain and drew letters and figures in the dust with their fingers, returning a year later to find their marks still intact."

Josef Krasa
The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

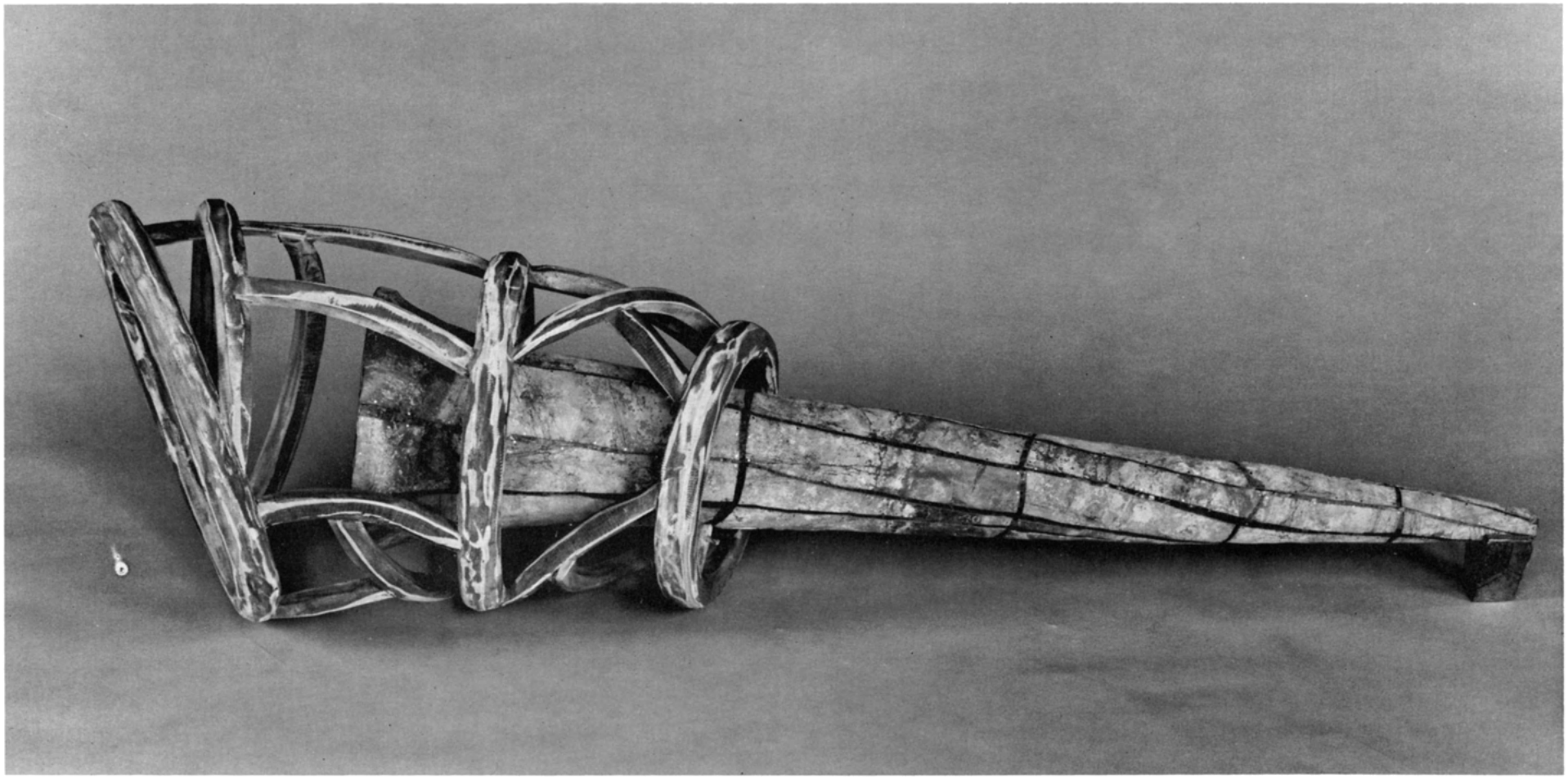
Our search into the past, into history, can be an encounter with enigmatic artifacts whose classification by archeologists and art historians is often irrelevant. The language of the artifacts can be strangely complex, built up with layers of partially stated meaning.

In Ellen Driscoll's work, fragments of a forgotten language have been reawakened. It is not that this language has now lost its unknown character, but rather as if some kind of music, almost out of reach of the human ear, has found its lost instruments and is now asking us to awaken in ourselves a corresponding receptivity.

Driscoll's sculptures appear to have greater density than their size seemingly would allow. Oxidized copper pieces cover the surface in irregular patterns and are often in conflict with the dominating organic or tool—like shapes they clothe, thereby calling attention to the existence of some kind of "irrational" tradition of craftsmanship.

In most of Driscoll's work one form emerges from another, forming ambiguous marks within a language of reverie and dislocation.

Lost Geography, 1987
Wood, lead, copper
80x24x24
Collection of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.



Catalogue

Maureen Connor

1.
Styx, 1986
Plaster, cloth, wax
13x8x40
Collection of the artist

2.
Charon, 1986
Plaster, cloth, wax
12x10x37
Collection of the artist

3.
Swell, 1986
Plaster, cloth, wax
10x9x37
Collection of the artist

4.
Floating Island, 1986
Plaster, cloth, wax
5x6x22
Collection of the artist

Petah Coyne

5.
Untitled, 1985
Mixed media
67x37x32
Collection of the artist

6.
Untitled, 1986
Mixed media
132x60x72
Collection of the artist

7.
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media
72x44x48
Collection of the artist

Ellen Driscoll

8.
Flint, 1987
Wood, oxidized copper
96½x18x4
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Kreizinga, New York

9.
Untitled, 1988
Wood, copper, paint
96x42x13 (two parts)
Courtesy of Damon Brandt Gallery, N.Y.

Carol Hepper

10.
Tropus, 1987
Wood, wire, pigment
79x47x47
Collection of Dr. Shelley Kolton and Maureen Klehe

11.
Portal, 1987
Fish skin, willow, wire, pigment
32x74x30
Collection of the artist

12.
Liquid Embrace III, 1986
Fish skin, willow, wire, pigment
62x26x27
Private collection, N.Y.

Creighton Michael

13.
Shell 8, 1987
Wood, paper, fiberglass, wax
47x33x24
Collection of the artist

14.
Spiderwing 3, 1987
Wood, paper, fiberglass, wax
18x83½x29
Collection of the artist

15.
Auk, 1987
Wood, paper, fiberglass, wax
51¼x36x20
Collection of the artist

Elise Siegel

16.
Rubicon, 1986
Wire mesh, acrylic modeling paste
8x7x65
Collection of the artist

17.
Ochre Reach, 1986
Wire mesh, acrylic modeling paste
6x8x56
Collection of the artist

18.
Offering, 1986
Wire mesh, acrylic modeling paste
32x15¼x24
Collection of the artist

19.
Night Slide, 1987
Wire mesh, acrylic modeling paste
32x18x28
Collection of the artist

Art Gallery

Southeastern Massachusetts University, College of Visual and Performing Arts
North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747 (617) 999-8546

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