

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ARTSPEAK

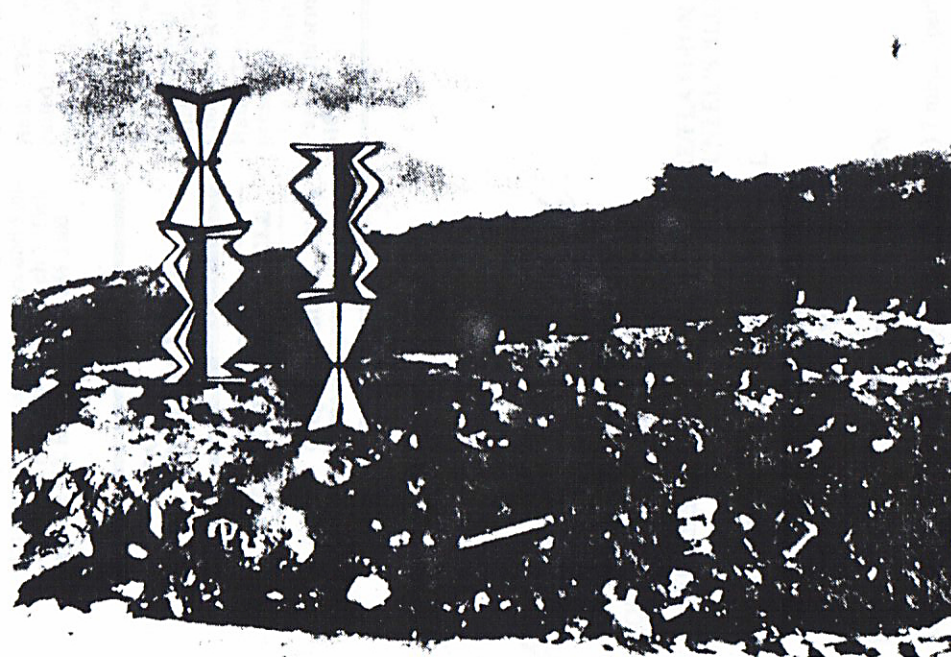
Phyllis Mark's "sites of the heart"

Martin Parsons

The term "site specific" can have more than one meaning. For Phyllis Mark, an important contemporary sculptor having a solo show at Soho 20 Gallery, 469 Broome Street, through January 6 (concurrent with her inclusion in a major group show of American artists at Mönchengladback Kulturforum in West Germany), a piece begins with a specific site in mind, and even if it ends up in another location, it retains the spirit of the place that inspired it. Thus, Mark calls her present exhibition, "Improbable Sites," since the places she has chosen are inaccessible to her, a fact that lends a cunning conceptual poignancy to the sculptures.

Mark has created an installation that immediately puts one in sympathy with her intentions. By combining her sculptures and maquettes with large photo murals (blown up from her own photographs of the works and the sites, merged by montage), she dramatizes the absolute "rightness" of her choices, sanctifying the imagined marriage of piece and place, making "site specific" a state of mind, if not a physical reality.

Mark's sculptures are, at once, monumental and whimsical. Comprised of geometric shapes in aluminum, painted in intricate hard-edged patterns with brilliant



Phyllis Mark, photo (4' h " 8' w) of East Hampton land fill with sculpture "Wind Sieve" as if sited there, Soho 20 Gallery

acrylic colors, carefully mixed to harmonize with natural surroundings (sometimes to a degree verging on camouflage), they have

moveable parts that emit distinctive sounds when blown by the wind. "Wind Harp at the Jackson Pollock/Lee Krassner Grave-

site," for example, has brightly colored slats, resembling the keys on a xylophone, that make mournful moaning sounds. As seen in the photo mural, shown along with the maquette, its toy-like gaiety presents an uplifting counterpoint to the gravity of the huge boulder that marks the famous couple's final resting place.

Equally moving is "Lo and Behold My Father's Woods," a large screen with open areas for sunlight to stream through. This piece and its companion photo mural memorialize a wooded area in Connecticut once owned by the artist's family. Now these beloved woods are part of a national park, but Phyllis Mark reclaims them in spirit with her sculpture, which seems to symbolize all of those former homes to which one cannot return (except, perhaps, in one's heart). Also outstanding are "Sun Chariot Resting," comprised of two huge wheels and a tall rod, festooned with colorful banners, conceived for a promontory jutting over the Pacific Ocean; and "Wind Sieve," two stately, sentry-like structures with gridded areas for catching the wind-borne feathers of the gulls that flock to a landfill in East Hampton.

"Improbable Sites" reveals the unique combination of monumental form and conceptual poetry that makes Phyllis Mark one of our most innovative public sculptors.