

Robert Mahoney, "New York in Review," Arts Magazine, 1989?

Gracie Mansion Gallery, Arts Magazine

"New York in Review"

By Robert Mahoney

Holzner's urbanity and wit was needed at the Snug Harbor Sculpture Festival. This year's event (through October 22) turned its back of the only strength of the site- the great old architecture- and scurried off into the bushes. Most of the sculptors could not see the trees for the bushes. In Lillian's *Mirage*, tiny lead wedges create temples about yea-high, look like wickets, act like they're surveying, and behave like lovers, catching and examining intimate emotions in the grass. This is sculpture about running 'round back of the bushes and finding another world there. Ruth Hardinger is also running off to do something private behind the bushes. Inspired by the hydrangeas, she spreads out an organic ceramic chess set for new-agers to push around the lawn by the West Gate. Her forms go down the drain of a too recent good-riddancing of corny Chicago vaginal imagery, however, to bubble on the eye of my age group correctly. It makes one wobble and swoon: to think this old mushroom humanism might be sprouting up again. The deja-vu whirl does eventually resolve itself, during an inspection of slate piled deep down the flytrap, into something like whimsical bemusement. Lorenzo Pace was also expired (er, inspired) by the blossoms on the bushes. His *Walking Dead* is inadmissible; it is not public sculpture: it is private business taken out of doors. About the only alibi I can provide for this stone dressed up as Frankenstein's bride is related to where sculptural thoughts of the dead normally belong. America, unlike France in its day, has no tradition of funerary sculpture. Sculptors can't make a living getting these whimsical morbidities out of their systems anymore. It is true that a taste for angels weeping busts did ebbside back into Paris parks, and weaseled perhaps by reference to the background of busts in paintings by Watteau and Fragonard, busts were set like ghosts in the bushes of the Luxemburg gardens. Maybe this is what is happening here: but, actually, if this is what sculptors want, Liriam Bloom is a much better example. Her Hoolilou hid in the bushes, and has a form and posture derivative of funerary or garden whimsies. In it, a horse pushes out of a cocoonish boulder set on three small balls. This fair embryology is weathered, and has a touch of grandeur, or melancholy at its demise. I liked it. In the same vein, inside the gallery, Deborah Masters still impresses by her sturdy and healthy figural solemnity. But the sad thing is- and this lends pathos to the work- Masters should have been born in 1850 to get the most out of her career. May Ann Unger repeats the archetypal modernist abstraction of the figure by goring it out into the realm of expressionistic gut-wrenches. The self-absorption of those in pain is reinforced by the quaint blasé character of stained-glass scenes of lighthouses and ports in the gallery décor. Ralph Martel's *Les Demoiselles* would have hung themselves on the obvious allusion of the title, had they not first got hung up and improved (drowned) by the decorative rigging of wheel and rope and anchor on the ceiling. Back outside, Jane Schneider is back in the bushes, doing something rather self-pleasuring only. The *Howling* sent me reeling again, hinting that that Boardwalk staple, driftwood sculpture, is coming back for a sequel. Dina Bursztyn's *The Other Life of a Tree* suggests the train of thought that this type of work looks the way it does because it is just too darn sensitive

over the lost amenities at the Snug Harbor site. Her very toady, pretty whimsy, shining back of a lost tree limb by ceramic prosthesis, is so odd it attracts the ducks. I thought the wonderland whimsy looked even better with quacks piped in, but then realized the beggars were after food. Seeing this, I noted a tree stump, and another; a drinking fountain that had been removed; two cement legs but no bench: a crippled site, begging a healing platonic love by females. The lack of fountainhead at Snug Harbor also annually makes a look at this rusting pond one of the chief sculptural movements of a visit. A lot of sculpture tries to compete with that decaying utility. There were a lot of poles this year- in Nade Haley, in Jesse Moore, in Marc Gordon. Lift is good, but then there must be balance, and further lift. These raised works all looked nervous, once raised. Gregory Sale resists the poles, though he did use a windmill. The windmill dug in at its heels and created a dangerously stubborn object on and in the ground. To get a look at Sale's floppy blades as they kicked up plaster before a distant view of New York also gave off a wild sense of being out of control, of frustration at being so Snug, of dying to come like Jason to Manhattan and tear up the town. Complex energy gave Sale's work pulse-excitement. Finally, the best in the show was by Robert Ressler, who was more focused here than at Socrates. In *Bread and Water*, a mast-like shaft, a carved out canoe, a large ball, were mounted on castings that let them spin. One spin and these objects swept out through the trees and scenery and brought it all together.