

## McCLAIN GALLERY

Just as her constructions were composed of the wooden castoffs of her time, Keister uses the refuse of our time: the molded packaging used for shipping electronic items. However, whereas the traditional assemblage strategy was to directly integrate non-art objects and materials into the final sculptures, avoiding traditional materials and methods of art making, Keister returns to these methods. He transforms his debris by making casts which maintain the original shape and

anthropomorphized, changed to stone, like an excavated Olmec statue with outlined skull, face, and eyes, is imprisoned by the remaining cutaway plasterboard of the gallery walls. In *Score*, in and out

cups and painted canvas milk cartons resemble the everyday objects they mimic, but are very slightly distorted too, as if formally showing us that as one reads into the objects, one transforms their original intentions. The absurd shapes of some of these sculptures suggests the absurdity of bestowing meaning upon our vernacular objects.

The work of Ron Griffin suggests that we desire to engage with and transform our world. Griffin layers the enamel of his representations of common objects such as folded boxes and envelopes in a way that makes the viewer think, upon first look, that the actual object could be lifted from the panel—if one could simply peel off the layers of shellac that hold it to the surface, like photos on a faux western café table.

*Twelve Airmail Envelopes*, arranged like a lens with its aperture wide open, perfectly suggests the narrow depth of field within which Griffin works. *Toy Box* represents an object which, when flattened, is difficult to read. The mind wants to create the object, to fold it into its proper 3D shape, to forget that it's a paint illusion. We want to manipulate it.

Whereas Keister encourages us to form meaning while

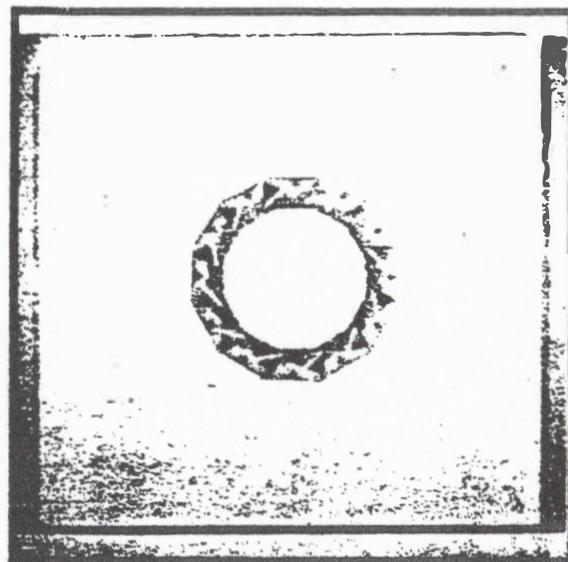
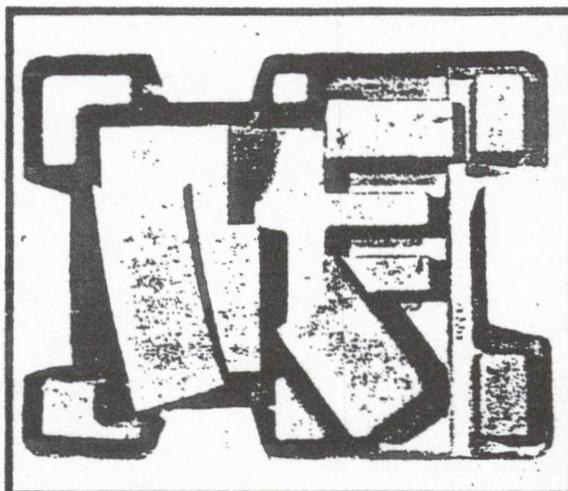
at the same time cautioning us to avoid fixing a static reading to our objects, Seliger mocks us for trying to read meaning into the items of our everyday culture and Griffin suggests that perhaps we should simply interact with the vernacular and be satisfied with its surface, without bothering to analyze its meaning at all.

—Michal Reed

*The Packaged Vernacular* closed February 15 at Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica.

Michal Reed is an artist and writer who is on the faculty at CalArts.

Clockwise from below: Jonathan Seliger, *Boygirl*, 1996, oil, alkyd, acrylic, molding paste on canvas, 7" x 2-7/8" x 2-7/8"; Steve Keister, *Pseudoglyph*, hydrostone, 14" x 16" x 4-1/2"; Ron Griffin, *Untitled (12 Airmail Envelopes)*, 1996, enamel, polyurethane on panel, 60" x 60", at Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica.



### 'The Packaged Vernacular'

**R**on Griffin's envelopes, Steve Keister's molded packing materials, and Jonathan Seliger's milk cartons go beyond the obvious Pop references to question the ways vernacular objects form meaning in the art world and in our lives.

Keister's *Buub* makes one think of Louise Nevelson's use of assemblage.

texture of the object, but convert his throw-aways into a more permanent resin and stone. *Buub* (totem), a polyester resin cast of the stacked packaging of the artist's TV, creates a statue whose sea foam green color references slick industrial decor while its shapes reference the very different time/place/spirit of ancient Mesoamerican sculpture.

It's not only for formal beauty that Keister translates a contemporary vernacular object into the most current of art materials. As his pieces interact with the surface of the walls of the gallery, he asks us to examine our relationship to the inside and the outside of the experiences of our everyday lives, physical and spiritual. *Embrasure*, its bit of packaging

change places, as the bowl or hub is packed in the wall, and we are pushed to think of the walls themselves as holding, protecting, confining. This change of context asks us to consider that perhaps both the electronic equipment and its packaging reference the vulnerability of everything that currently defines us.

Seliger also plays with the inside and the out in *Boygirl*, a resemblance of a cardboard light bulb container turned inside out. Pink, the wrong side, is now on the outside; the readable blue side is hidden, inside. While the colors specifically suggest the arena of gender, *Boygirl* also questions what happens when we figuratively turn things inside out. Seliger's constructions of paper coffee