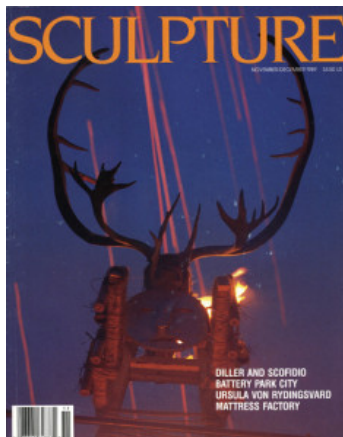


SCULPTURE

MAGAZINE



“Sky Art Alaska” – Sculpture, Nov/Dec 1989 Review



ALASKA

“Sky Art Alaska”

**Visual Arts Center of Alaska,
Anchorage**

Sculpture – *A Publication of the International Sculpture
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Each year the Visual Arts Center of Alaska hosts Sky Art
Alaska, a two-day outdoor celebration of ephemeral sculpture
held in downtown Anchorage

Enthusiastic viewers of this year’s event observed the site-specific works against the backdrop of the Chugach Mountains and the Alaska range. The diffused light of the Alaskan summer affected each of the works differently. To the local artists in the show, the 18-hour, horizon-circling solar arc came as no surprise; to some of the others, however, it presented a rather dis-orienting change.

The elegantly crafted *Sky Plane* by Dale Eldred of Kansas City, Missouri, was a large, open grid of metal squares covered with finely grooved diffraction grating (14,500 grooves per inch). Held 90 feet aloft by the slim arm of a crane, the piece was never passive; its angle constantly readjusted to face the sun as it moved across the sky. Receiving the image of flat, gray-white clouds, the piece became a silvery, multi-paneled window to the sky; at breaks of sunlight, it burst into activity, reflecting a vibrant, changing rainbow of color.

Exaggerated clichés characterized Bob Wade's *The Allure of Alaska*, a giant fluorescent fishing lure fashioned from the float of an amphibious airplane. The painted assemblage dangled from a crane, its garish surveyor's tape tail swaying with the inlet breezes. There was more than humor to this Texan's work: its materials and theme suggested the hasty construction of the Alaskan frontier development.

Blue Light, Blue Night, Hartola, by Wisconsin artist Rolf Westphal, was a row of wood-framed obelisks covered in deep blue Kynar, an industrial fabric woven of plastic. Three squarish obelisks at each end of the row leveled off at about three feet, while a central pair rose to tall, slender points. Inside each obelisk was a standard road flare. Ignited after nightfall, the flares sputtered neon red light that was redefined by the moire of the mesh into continually twisting fingers. Impossible to fa visually, these wild, unpredictable motions were reminiscent of the northern lights. Confining the light within the obelisks, the artist made it seem as if he had temporarily captured aurora borealis.

Midnight Sky Drop, by San Antonio's Ted Gardeline, was another installment in his series of works jettisoned from small aircraft, with three releases of parachutes strung to battery-operated pen lights. Each batch of 100 lights dispersed almost instantaneously, leaving an arresting image of a swarm of rosy aureolas beneath the plane's dark silhouette.

Farewell to Ron, a tribute to a recently deceased northern artist, was Bill Fitz-Gibbons' contribution to the celebration. Mounted atop a 20-foot scaffold, a primitive, wooden stick figure with a metallic mask and caribou antlers made reference to Alaska's indigenous people, raw terrain and crude built environment. At midnight, FitzGibbons set off pyrotechnic fountains and missiles that burst, glowed and showered above the effigy. Sparklers in its out-stretched hands fizzed and burned, a fiery handshake with the sky. Because of the incendiary nature of this work, its careful execution effectively elicited a reverence for the transience of human life.

REVIEWS



ALASKA
"Big Art Alaska"
Visual Arts Center of Alaska
Review by

Each year the Visual Arts Center of Alaska presents a series of exhibitions, including a major one in the fall. This year's exhibition, "Big Art Alaska," is a collection of works by local and visiting artists. The exhibition is held in the Visual Arts Center's main gallery, which is a large, open space with high ceilings and large windows. The works are displayed on tall, thin structures, some of which are suspended from the ceiling. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and scale.

CALIFORNIA
Steven Poyling
Visual Arts Center

Steven Poyling's work is a collection of small, square, fluorescent fishing lures. The lures are made of wood and are painted in various colors. They are suspended from a crane, and their movement is captured in a series of photographs. The resulting image is a vibrant, multi-paneled window to the sky, reflecting a vibrant, changing rainbow of color.

Reacting to light, which dominates all activity on the earth's surface, these and other Sky Art works gave a visual context from which to consider both natural and manufactured phenomena unique to this far-northern region.