

## A Bountiful Season In Outdoor Sculpture Reveals Glimmers Of a New Sensibility

By MICHAEL BRENSON

**A**T a moment of so much promise for sculpture, the first question to be asked about the outdoor sculpture season is whether the vitality is evident here, too. The answer is an emphatic yes.

Indeed, this is the best season for outdoor sculpture in some time. There is more of it, there is more of it with a clear sense of purpose, and together the works now occupying the fields, streets and walls of New York City reflect many of the issues with which sculptors are now concerned.

In addition, in the large exhibition at the South Beach Psychiatric Center on Staten Island, there are signs of a new generation and a new sensibility — one that brings to outdoor sculpture a wide-open, Post-Modern approach to sources and materials.

There are a number of possible reasons for the present abundance. Although there appear to be a growing number of sculptors and a growing interest in sculpture, there are still only a handful of galleries willing to show large-scale work, even by artists with a reputation. As a result, many young sculptors now look immediately outdoors for outlets that might enable their work to be seen.

Partly because of the bottom-line mentality that still decides what many galleries do and do not show, other, more-established artists prefer to keep at least one foot outside the gallery system. Some of the most thoughtful outdoor sculpture is by artists with a clear distaste for commercialism and a clear social commitment. John Ahearn, David Finn and Christy Rupp are part of a growing list of sculptors who exhibit in galleries but whose hearts are in the streets.

Another factor is the impact of the Community Arts Development Program of New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs. The seven-year-old program is directed by Marie Artesi, who looks for sites and then works with community organizations and the artists they commission. Not all the works supported by the Community Arts Development Program are successful, and it is possible that the stringent requirements will not allow for a work of major ambition. But the restrictions also create a bond between art and place that can infuse a work with a special strength.

Most of the noteworthy outdoor work this season falls into two main categories. One is the outdoor sculpture exhibition, which often includes work that would be as effective in galleries. The other consists of individual works, usually commissioned, and as dependent upon the site as a Renaissance sculpture depends upon its niche.

### Site-Specific Works

Louise Bourgeois (Doris Freedman Plaza, 60th Street and Fifth Avenue). Louise Bourgeois's "Eyes" is one of the more successful installations in the Doris Freedman Plaza. The white marble sculpture consists basically of a cubic block with two spherical eyes perched on top of it, guarding the entrance to Central Park. The work has an ancient and futuristic aspect to it. If it suggests one or two frontal pharaonic figures, it is also like alien beings staring into space; it even suggests a mock version of Henry Moore's "King and Queen." Like many of Bourgeois's works, "Eyes" is both childlike and provocative, with a sculptural tautness that the Public Art Fund, which sponsored the work, recognized was perfect for the site. (Through Oct. 31.)

Hera (Glenwood Houses, 1704 Ralph Avenue, between Glenwood and Farragut Roads, Brooklyn). Hera's "Vaulted Arbor" consists of strips of galvanized steel forming an arch 22½ feet high and 43 feet wide. The steel brings to mind the ribs of a Romanesque and a Gothic vault. Since there is nothing between the ribs, however, this architectural sculpture has the feeling of a religious edifice waiting to be built. Hera clearly wanted this work to protect and inspire.

"Vaulted Arbor" was produced by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden with a grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs Community Arts Development Program. The Botanic Garden provided different kinds of plants, which have been attached to the steel so that they climb like ivy. If they ever cover the steel completely, the work will resemble a natural temple.