

## ART

# Trying to Bridge the Gap Between Seeing and Knowing

By HELEN A. HARRISON

**I**F you consider the relationship between knowledge and art, most likely it will be in terms of the study of art history or keeping up with current developments. The role played by the cognitive process in both creativity itself and art appreciation is not a subject of popular interest these days, when the sensual values and emotional qualities of art are in the ascendance.

In fact, many artists are mistrustful of the intellect as a source of esthetic endeavor, and audiences, too, often feel distanced from art that is clearly grounded in the thought process. Yet cognition — the act of knowing — is a key factor not only in creativity but also in the appreciation of many forms of art, a fact that makes "Minding Measure: Measuring Mind," the current exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, both thought-provoking and visually stimulating.

The six artists represented all base their work in one way or another on transmitting information to the viewer by means of a symbolic language. The symbols they use are not related to myth, imagination or emotion, but bear directly on the nature of perception itself — in other words, how we receive and process what we see. The gap between seeing and knowing is often greater than we may realize, and these artists are working to bridge that gap.

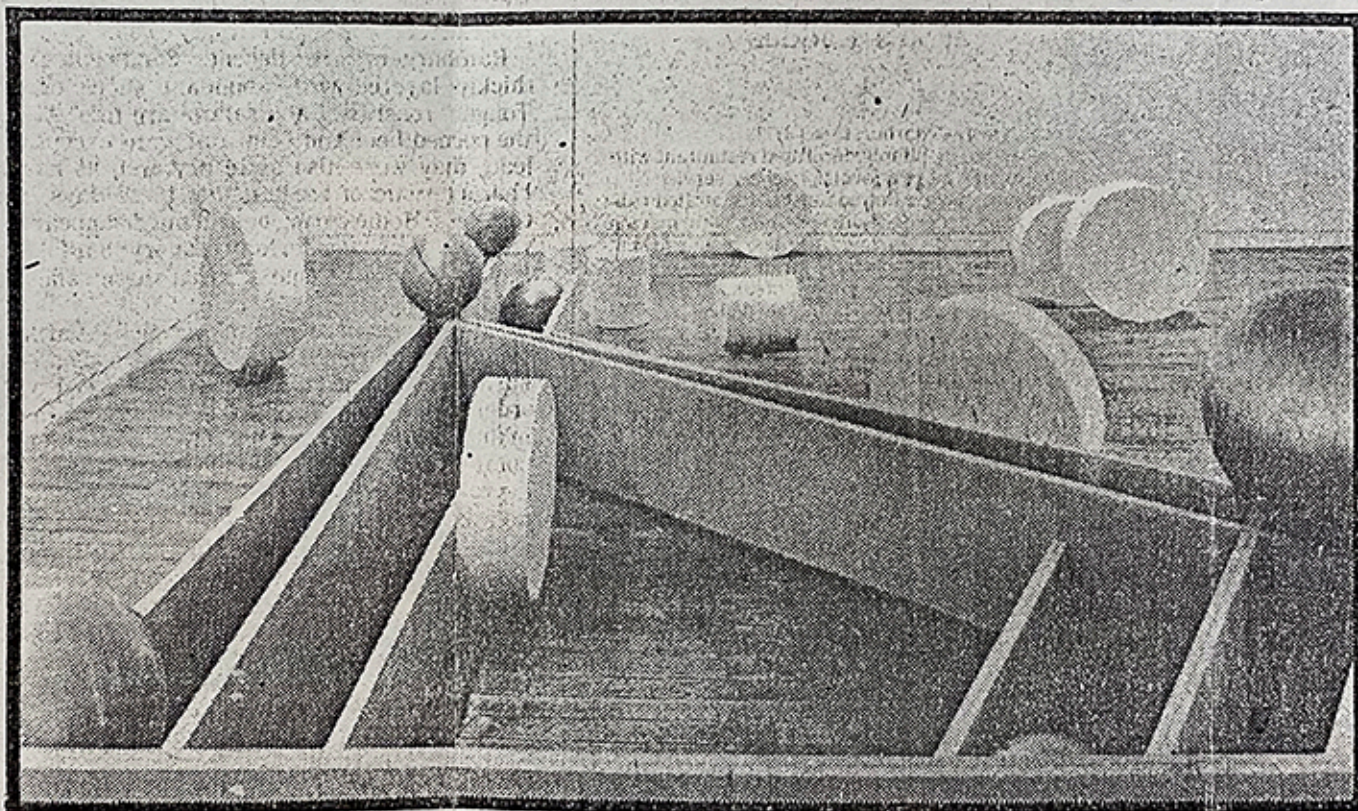
Regardless of its theoretical basis and despite the scientific overtones,

the art in this show remains a personal, subjective experience, as the guest curator, Betty Collings, points out. But she also notes that our responses can be directed both by the way visual material is presented and by our preconceptions about what we are seeing.

Mel Bochner's keynote piece, for example, relies on the assumption that a given measurement, in this case, a black line 48 inches long, remains unchanged even when the line is distorted or removed from an objective frame of reference. A series of such lines, clearly identified as four feet in length, are deployed over the gallery wall, jogging around corners, crossing moldings and floating free. Direct comparisons are impossible; we must take it for granted that the artist is telling the truth about them. Are they really all equal? Empirically, we can't tell.

A more complex perceptual puzzle is created in William Ramage's environmental restructuring, based on the distortion of linear perspective, of an entire room. His measured drawings give little indication of how the physical experience of standing at one of two centripetal points causes all the pieces of this puzzle to fall into place. Like the anamorphoses that delighted the Renaissance eye, his manipulated space makes no sense until the viewer is correctly positioned, allowing the mind to impose its own logic.

Thomas Macaulay is also concerned with fixed-point perception. His installation on the gallery's stair-



"Standard Tasks/Observation, Examination, Isolation" by Barry Le Va

case seems to be a random arrangement of black paper shapes and taped lines, until the viewer arrives at the precise spot where visual conjunction occurs. Space and distance suddenly lose their meaning as reality is transformed into an illusion that "makes

sense" to the mind in spite of what we realize to the contrary.

In the main gallery, Barry Le Va's work, described as a "sparse terrain of enigmatic indicators," resembles the ruins of a giant pinball machine. Spheres and cylinders are arranged

around wall-like channels, and we can enter this ambiguous relic like archeologists viewing the remains of a forgotten culture. Here, the curious elegance of the suggestive forms is more powerful than the perceptual influence the piece may exert.

This is also true of Ann Dewald's shimmering "luminants," a room full of metal conduits suspended from the ceiling and tipped with glowing neon loops. A color progression from electric blue to vibrant red is achieved in three stages of a diamond pattern, and visitors can walk amid these high-tech stalactites for a direct interaction with their ominous beauty. A low-voltage hum is evident, and the elements sway disconcertingly as one passes between them, causing an uneasy feeling.

Judy Rifka, an artist who creates fragmented, schematic versions of human activity, is showing a series of drawings in which figures seem to race across the field of vision. She pits sprinting men against laid-back turtles in a humorous reference to the futility of the race against time, also making a broader comment on the tension and anxiety in the pace of modern life. A certain kinship with Futurism is evident, pointing up the difficulty of representing motion in a static medium. Her work is relevant to the show's theme, however, because it acts as a visual shorthand that the mind must decipher, again making clear that what we see and what we know are interactive.

The exhibition will be on view through Feb. 24. The museum, at 50 Irish Lane in East Islip, is open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. and Sundays from 2 to 4:30 P.M. Admission is free.

REMEMBER THE NEEDLE!