



Mari Skarpa's mixed-media "Wire," uses material from abandoned farms.

Courtesy of the artist

ALL's tactile sculptures are engaging and evocative 'Transformations'

By Judy Birke

ART REVIEW

NEW HAVEN — Running counter to the recent vogue for conceptual sculpture characterized by an overall aura of cool irony and high-tech presentation, the current exhibit at Arts + Literature Laboratory trends toward sculpture that is more tactile, messy and

linked by materials, concept and process to the natural world.

"Transformations," running through Sept. 23 at the Erector Square gallery, is an engaging and

- **Title:** "Transformations"
- **Where:** ALL (Arts + Literature Laboratory) 319 Peck St., Erector Square, New Haven
- **When:** Through Sept. 23; 1-4 p.m., Saturdays, Sundays
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** (203) 671-5175

well-configured show.

When considered as a complete entity, the inclusions create a self-contained landscape of well-crafted physical forms. The most striking aspect of the exhibit is the sculptors' sensitivity to both materials and their suggestive nar-

rative, each "transformation" arising from varied evocative origins.

Some of the works like Stephanie Victa's "Spiral of Horns," appeal through a sense of natural organic growth and change, suggesting a

metamorphosis that at times evokes the feeling that they are still in the process of taking form.

Others, like Amelia de Neegaard's "Twig Field 1," and Joseph Saccio's "Splitting," give new order, while retaining aspects of the old, to nature's definition, de Neegaard imposing definition and structure on random twigs and branches, Saccio altering the origins of a wooden tree beam and a bundle of rattan, to form a single geometric form with a new contour and meaning of its own.

Jim Jacobs, too, uses tree materials to create a graceful wall sculpture

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ALL: Materials take on a new life, energy

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of maple wood and mulberry limbs. Subtle and elegant, Jacobs pays mindful attention to the balance of materials, juxtaposing them against each other to form an integrated balance reminiscent of a soundless landscape, tranquil and orderly.

Some works, like those by Mari Skarp and Paul Sakren, find a particularly satisfying dialogue between materials and concept, both artists achieving a meaningful transformation that blends the materials with evocative narrative.

Primal, palpable, with a rich tactile surface, subtle color and textural variations, and a lively primitive energy, Sakren's organic expression, "Tine Anns an Blog (Fire in the Belly)," references the lifestyles of early Irish tribes, his rich bulbous form reflecting, it seems, the containment of nature's offerings and life's accumulations,



ALL
"Spiral of Horns" by Stephanie Victa suggests metamorphosis.

both strong and vulnerable, all stimulated by nature's visceral force.

In "Wire," Skarp mines the potential of junk to create a com-

elling piece that references the continuing disappearance and destruction of natural farmland in the United States. Her symbol, a downtrodden horse, points to the farm animals who are the direct victims that can no longer live naturally. Gritty and assertive, with a sense of impurity and use, Skarp uses materials found on abandoned farms, like rusted wire and metal, to suggest complex literal and emotional layers in a meaningful and touching work, at once quiet and contemplative and strong and provocative.

Peter Dellert's "Accretion" and "Gleaning," a pair of pod-like forms made of tin cans and wood, find their strength enriched by the surface variations. Like flamboyant pods, they beg for contemplation as to their contents, if any.

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Judy Birke of New Haven is a freelance writer and art consultant