



GALLERIES

Collages Go to College, And Behave Accordingly

An Art of Disharmony That Involves Forcing Disparate Materials Together

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Most paintings, particularly abstract and impressionistic ones, pull into focus from a distance, but when it comes to looking at collage, you really have to get up close.

I was reminded of this wisdom while visiting "Bits and Pieces: The Collage Impulse" at the Lehman College Art Gallery. It is an enjoyable show of almost 40 collages by 33 emerging artists and those better known for working in the collage medium. Works are grouped by content and materials, but by and large all the artists are interested in making art by piecing things together.

Collage comes from the French word *coller*, which means "to stick." It is a technique that was popularized in the early 20th century by Picasso and Braque, both of whom began to stick newspapers, bus tickets and other kinds of printed material onto their composi-

"Bits and Pieces: The Collage Impulse," Lehman College Art Gallery, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, the Bronx, through Jan. 11. (718) 960-8731 or www.lehman.edu/gallery.

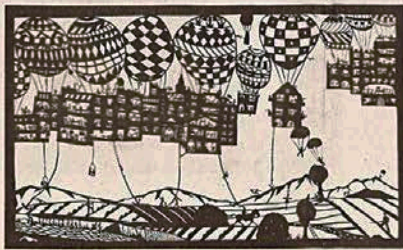
tions in search of greater verisimilitude.

Much of the work assembled at Lehman is also built from pieces of paper or a similarly malleable material. These include assemblages of bits of lottery tickets and product packaging by Yunsook Park and Michael Cooper and collages by Mark Wagner and C. K. Wilde that use banknotes.

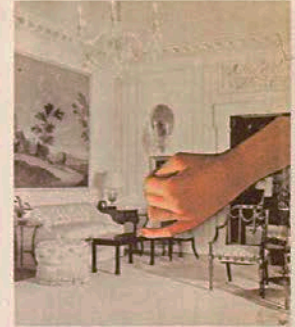
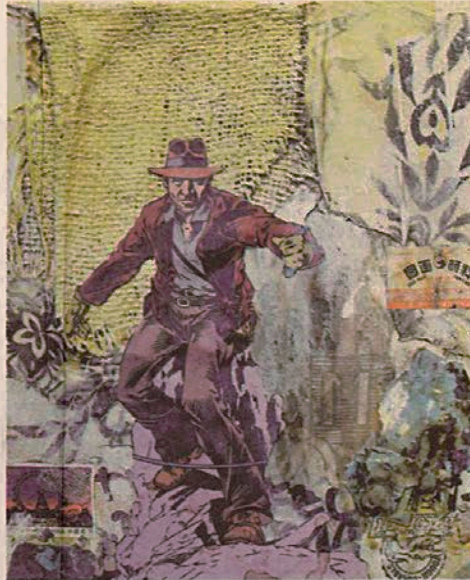
Mr. Wagner's contribution — an "employee of the month" poster made out of cut and pasted pieces of United States currency — is especially memorable. It

is a joke on corporate America, where some lowly paid workers, though treated poorly by their employers, are occasionally acknowledged in an effort to make them feel more appreciated.

What is common to all collage is intentional compositional disharmony — that is, a forcing together of materials, objects and images of one kind or another that do not properly belong in the same realm. It is an easy thing to do, but to create a good artwork from this process is another thing entirely.



URBAN FIBER
Béatrice Coron's collage, "Balloon City 2006," is made from pieces of Tyvek envelopes.



MYTHIC MIX

Oliver Peterson's take on the lore of the Wild West, at left, is one of nearly 40 collages on display at Lehman College Art Gallery. Works by Caroline Golden, above, and Patrick Donahue, far left, are also part of the exhibition.

In the early 1920s, the Dada artists used collage to create spontaneous juxtapositions of objects; the Surrealists carried this idea into paintings. In the current show, several artists rely on Surrealistic painting conventions, including irrational juxtapositions and incongruities of scale, and have a preference for garish colors. They often combine drawing and collage to create fantasy landscapes — those of Josh Dorman, Alejandra Villasmil, Melissa Barrett Lundquist and Dodi Wexler are especially impressive.

When it comes to collage landscapes, you want to see how the image or object is made, how all of the little pieces fit together. Then you can step back and take in the whole thing. That is the case with Mr. Dorman's "More and Less Lost" (2007), a busy concoction of ink drawing and collage over an antique map. The imagery is arranged vertically, much like a Chinese scroll painting, though much busier, with many things happening simultaneously — a kind of post-modern Brueghel.

There is also a great deal of abstract collage, which is to say artwork that doesn't pretend to represent anything at all. Among the artists exhibiting that

kind of work are Mario Naves, Barbara Landes, Jerry Mischak and David Poppie. Their works are delicate and gorgeous if generally inaccessible, for as much as I enjoyed looking at them I had no idea what they were about.

Other artists make works with found materials and the discards of daily life, though the show stops short of including the work of grunge-assemblage artists like Rachel Harrison. There is no collage sculpture or installation art here at all, at least not any installed on the floor. However, strangely, there is one video, made up, like a sequential collage, of fragmented stills.

Images clipped from cartoons and children's books are another popular source of collage material. Their use here often results in intricate, intimate-looking fantasy scenes. Some of these works are provocative and thoughtful, including Oliver Peterson's messy mixed-media take on American history and the mythology of the Wild West. It is easily overlooked, mingled here with the more decorative works.

One of the great virtues of this exhibition is the way in which it shows off a diversity of collage strategies and techniques. Clearly the collage impulse is alive and well in contemporary art.