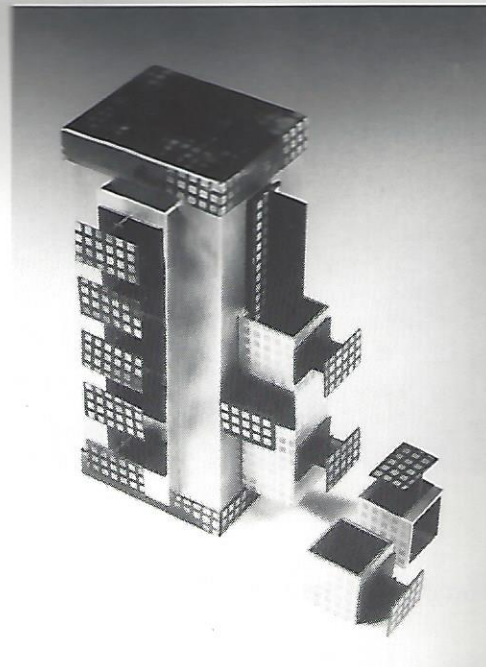


LEFT
ROY
Neopolis bracelet
silver, 3 x 7 x 1/8"
1992



Anne Krohn Graham
Table Tower Vessel
anodized aluminum, 6"H.
Photo courtesy Aaron Faber Gallery

Souvenirs of New York: Jewelry and Objects Inspired by the City

Aaron Faber Gallery,
New York City
July 1 – September 4, 1992

by Lanie Lee

Just as the diversity and density of Manhattan can become overwhelming, so too can an exhibit of works by 25 artists using souvenirs of NYC as a theme. The exhibition at Aaron Faber Gallery offered a hodgepodge of themes and styles that ranged from the abstract to the narrative, and while most of the objects were jewelry there were also wall pieces, flatware, clocks and vessels. Although the majority of works were placed in display cases in two rooms on the mezzanine level, other pieces were displayed in the jewelry store on the main floor and some were in the display case facing the street. As a result, it was often hard to determine what was actually a part of the exhibition. The seemingly haphazard placement of jewelry pinned to gray-clothed boards in display cases and the scattering of objects on the walls in between the cases detracted from both viewing individual works and viewing the exhibit as a whole.

It came as no surprise that the dominant images in the exhibition were the skyscrapers that have made the city both the concrete jungle of the nation and the architectural role model for other U.S. cities. The concentration of skyscrapers on the island of Manhattan has captured the imagination of many in the past and continues as a convention in this show. The cool, sleek vertical lines of these urban monoliths seem particularly compatible with much contemporary jewelry design. In *Neopolis*, a bracelet by ROY, simple straight-edged geometric shapes cast from sterling silver were linked together, building by building, to create a cityscape. A wide band of smooth silver denoted the outline and varied heights of the midtown skyline. Its jagged edge resembled a crown – a majestic yet detached symbol of the city. ROY also exhibited a number of sterling silver and oxidized brass pins, depicting building facades and titled *East Village*. In some of the pins brass steps led to nowhere in particular. Perhaps these pins referred to the ongoing controversy of gentrification that has plagued the neighborhood for years. ROY's designs simplified the complexity of the city, revealing a beauty often overlooked or taken for granted.

New York City's architecture was also the motif for a set of 10 anodized aluminum containers called *Table Tower Vessels* by Anne Krohn Graham. These freestanding three-dimensional structures, with areas painted with grids of color, formed a whimsical group. As space is always a

precious commodity in NYC, some of these vessels served double duty as vases or flatware containers and they also had compartments that pulled out into either napkin or candlestick holders.

The sidewalk was clearly the inspiration for Chris Darway's bracelet, composed of rectangular sterling frames filled with concrete and embedded with images synonymous with the city. The piece recalled an aerial perspective of New York. Darway successfully alleviated the normally weighty feel of concrete and silver by including light-hearted images on the surface pushing the hardness of the miniature pavement to the background.

Since the Statue of Liberty is probably the single most-used image for souvenir items, it seemed equally appropriate as the inspiration for works in this exhibition. Linda Kindler Priest used different profiles and views of the statue's face to make sterling silver pins that were studded with either opal, lapis, garnet, or pearl. Ms. Liberty also appeared in sterling silver flatware pieces by Susan Provda.

Though displaced people tend to be an eyesore to many (whenever there is a convention, the homeless become targeted for removal), for Antonia H. Schwed they became the focus of two well-conceived pieces. In a mixed-media wall piece, *Vietnamese Veteran Living in the City*, Schwed used a box with variously sized compartments to narrate her theme. Within each compartment were fragments symbolic of the vet's experiences. Objects such as heads, figures, a fetus and a door represented aspects of both the physical and the psychological life. This collage left a jarring imprint and represented an aspect of the city that few dared to address in an exhibit of this nature. The other piece, a small figurine of a black male wrapped in a colorful, elaborate cloak, calls to mind those fragile statuettes that line souvenir shop shelves. Made of enamel, copper, and clay this piece, *Little City Prince* had a fairy-tale aura to it. Perhaps it was Schwed's way of restoring dignity to those that have been stripped of it. These works confronted a social issue that many would like to forget in an environment that oftentimes seems to be an escape from the reality of the city.

Lanie Lee is a writer and editor residing in New York City.