

Collaborate to Fill One Main Space

BY TOM MCKNIGHT

With its tremendous cement columns and dirt floors, the Artists' Window at One Main Street is a cold and lifeless space between exhibitions.

The overwhelming architecture of the display space itself and consistently windy conditions for visiting viewers provides an eerie setting when an installation is in place, and usually, the work reflects the gloom and mystery that pervades the One Main enclave, just upland from the East River on the Fulton Ferry waterfront.

"Altervista," the current installation, sets out to work against these pressing influences, to transform the space into a light and weightless form which offers relief from the cold geometry of the Artists' Window.

A project of the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists' Coalition, "Altervista" is the collaborative effort of four Brooklyn artists from an idea of organizer Vesela Sretenovic. She sought to transform the rigid form of the One Main space, and to do so through an experiment in pure collaboration, where each artist partakes in the entire development of the installation, rather than presenting an array of individual works.

ELEMENTS OF DRAWING, SCULPTURE

Because the "Altervista" installation attempts to assimilate the concepts of spacial drawing and sculpture, Sretenovic chose artists with experience working on paper and sculptors with a feeling for texture. Involved in the collaborative experiment were: Laura McCallum, who works in sculpture and drawing; sculptor Nancy Steinson; Elizabeth Ierulli, a painter with a background in theatrical scenery; and James Nelson, educated in sculpting, now involved with drawing and sketching.

The result of the collaboration is an installation made of steel strips arranged in a weightless configuration, merged with translucent mylar, vinyl and fiberglass, sometimes floating amidst the steel, other times heaped atop wire molds scattered through the space.

The installation is backlit by obscured bulbs, providing a brightness to the exhibit without the light sources in eyesight to distract from the weightless scene.

Companion to the installation is Dean Brown's adjacent photo display, an exploration into non-representational photography and the effects of screened light on a black background. Due to the translucent materials and subtle lighting employed for the project, Sretenovic suggests visitors slink down to the waterfront after dark to get the best impact from viewing "Altervista."

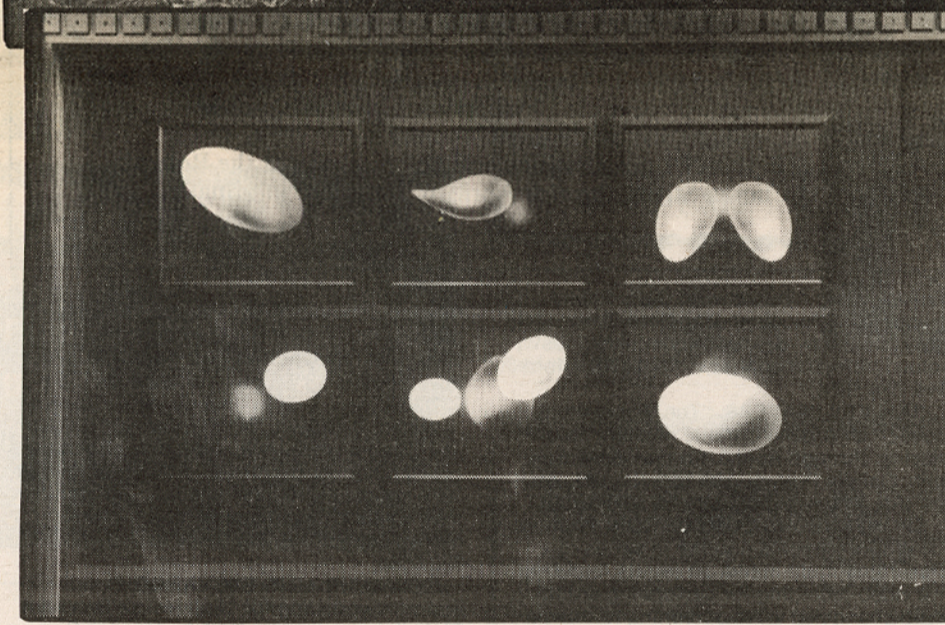
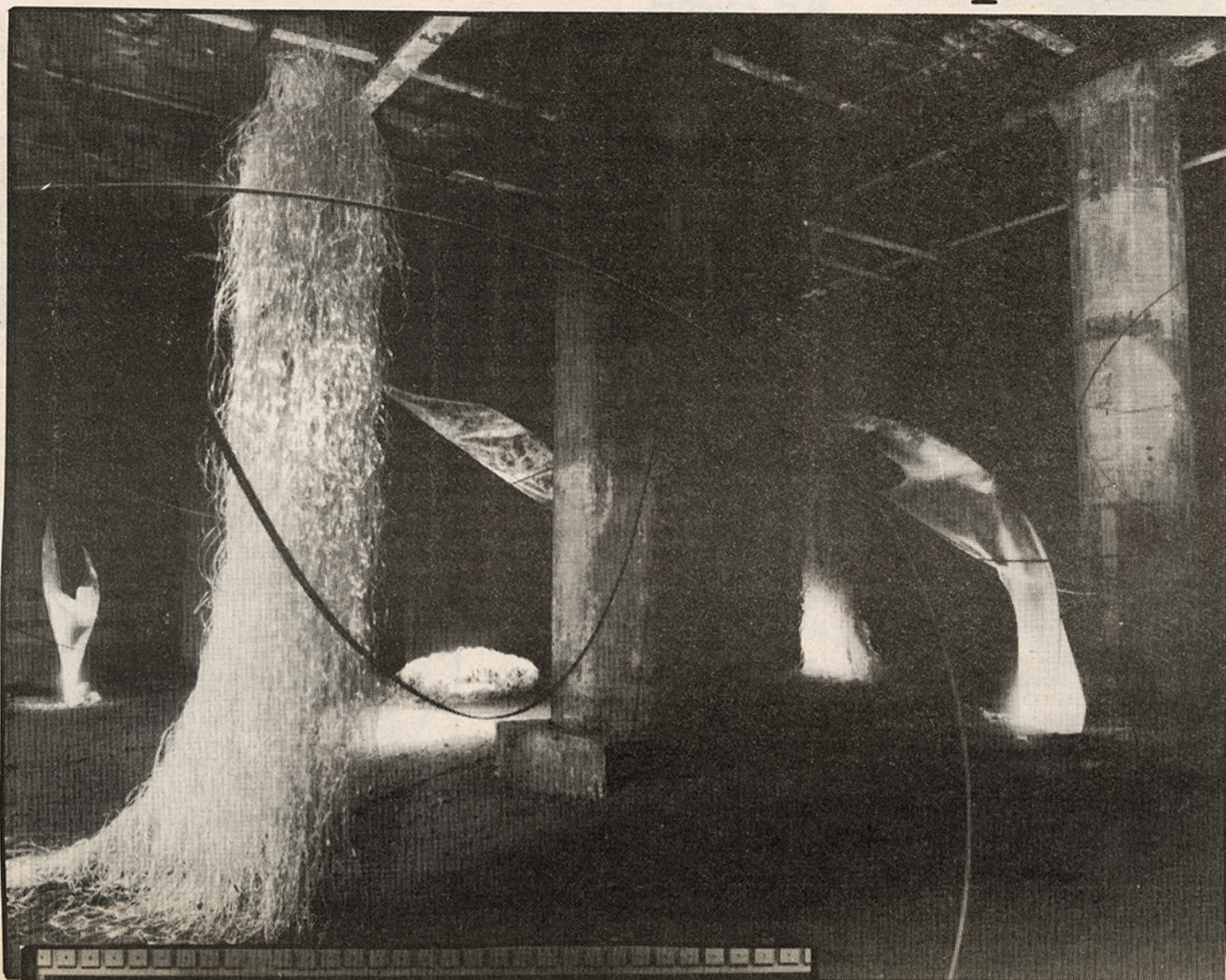
DEALING WITH CONCEPTUAL CLASHES

When a group of artists used to working alone takes up the task of presenting such a collaborative project as "Altervista," there will inevitably be some conceptual clashing when the strong-minded meet. For the artists who worked on this installation, initial disagreements resolved themselves as the four got used to working together during the month of meetings to plan the project.

Jim Nelson saw this period of exchanging ideas the most difficult, but one which planted the seeds for a successful presentation. "It was harder to talk about the project for long hours in the planning stage than to actually do it," he said. "By the time we did start work, we had developed enough trust to agree on a direction for the project."

For Nancy Steinson, essential to the process of finding a direction was the experience of "letting go" of individual wants and wishes for the project, an almost Eastern idea. "We all came with a way of working and with certain aesthetic concepts, and sometimes we had to let go of these," Steinson said.

"The result was a dance of different aesthetic concepts and because of the unity of the material, the installation is visually a kind of dance." The "marriage of minds" Laura McCallum described of the "Altervista" group kept the dance lively and in step.



Top: the collaboration in the One Main Street space. Above, the scene in the Artists' Window. Below, the collaborators, from left: Dean Brown, Elizabeth Ierulli, James Nelson, Nancy Steinson, Laura McCallum. (Dean Brown Photos)



Guided by Sretenovic's initial vision of the Artists' Window as a light, translucent and fluid space, the artists presented their ideas to the group, bringing with them the material they envisioned would provide that sense of airiness. Nelson suggested the use of a clear acetate paper; McCallum brought fiberglass thread to the group; Ierulli created wire framework; and Steinson suggested implementing the massive steel strips.

In keeping with the collaborative spirit of the project, an element from each of the artists' suggestions is part of the final installation. Nelson's acetate is stretched over sections of steel stripping, seeming to float above the ground, and casting shadows through the space.

Hanging from the ceiling like interwoven vines and heaped over wire frames so as to resemble stout bushes is McCallum's fiberglass.

The subtle glow of light which grew from Ierulli's flare for the theatre reveals the installation's translucent elements.

Spread out through the space, reaching from wall to wall in great arcs, are Steinson's steel strips, weightless and seeming to wish for movement.

As much as "Altervista" succeeds in shedding light into the usually eerie corners of the One Main space and convincingly dissolves its constraining walls and columns, the result, say the artists, was less important than the success of process of collaborating. "It didn't matter much if the installation turned out well," said Nelson, "The purpose was much more an experiment in collaboration, and that was the great success."

ALTERVISTA: A collaborative project by members of the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition, organized by Vesela Sretenovic. One Main Street and the Artists' Window, between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges on the Fulton Ferry waterfront. On view 24 hours a day, through April 16th. For information, 596-2507.