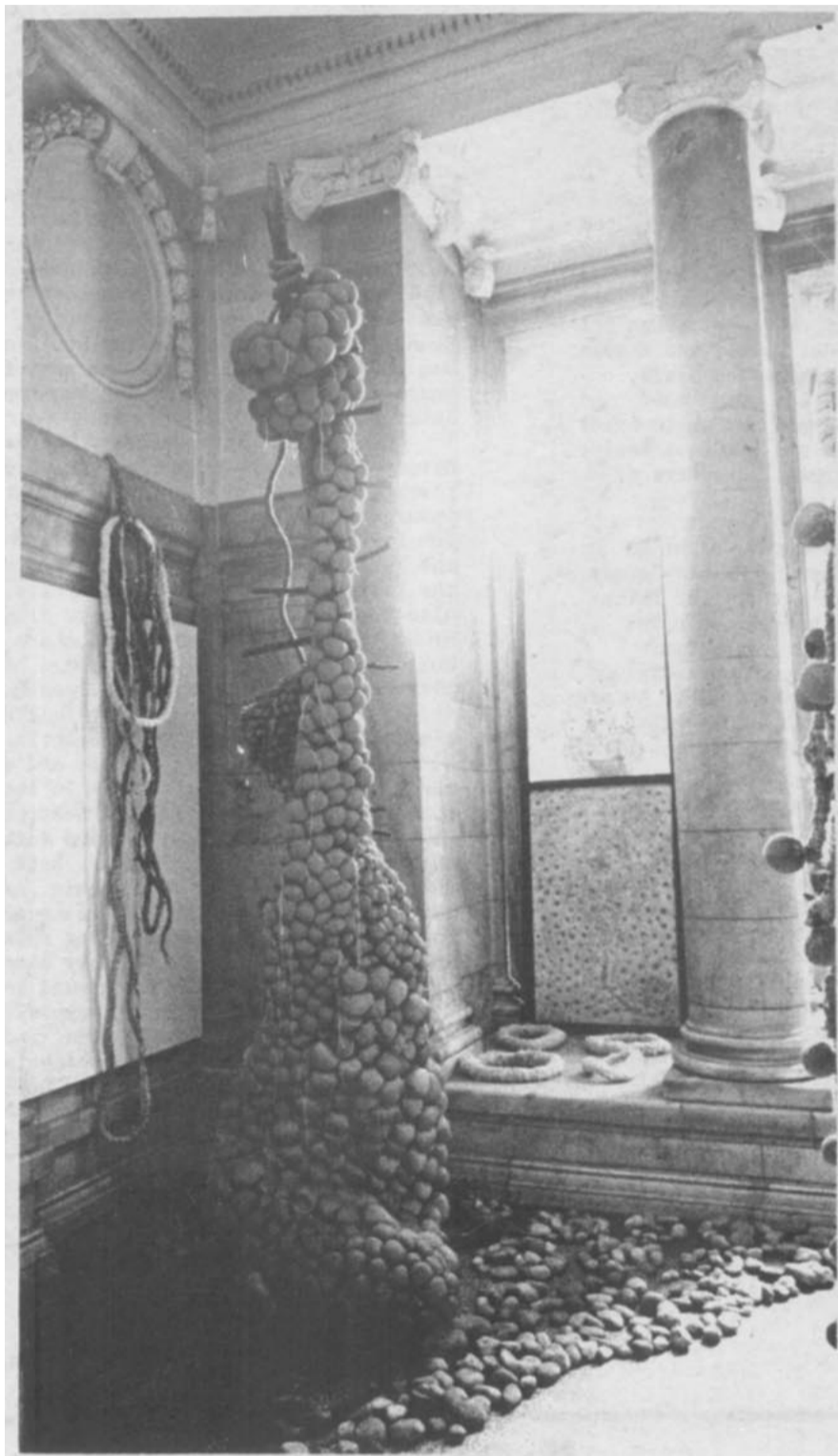
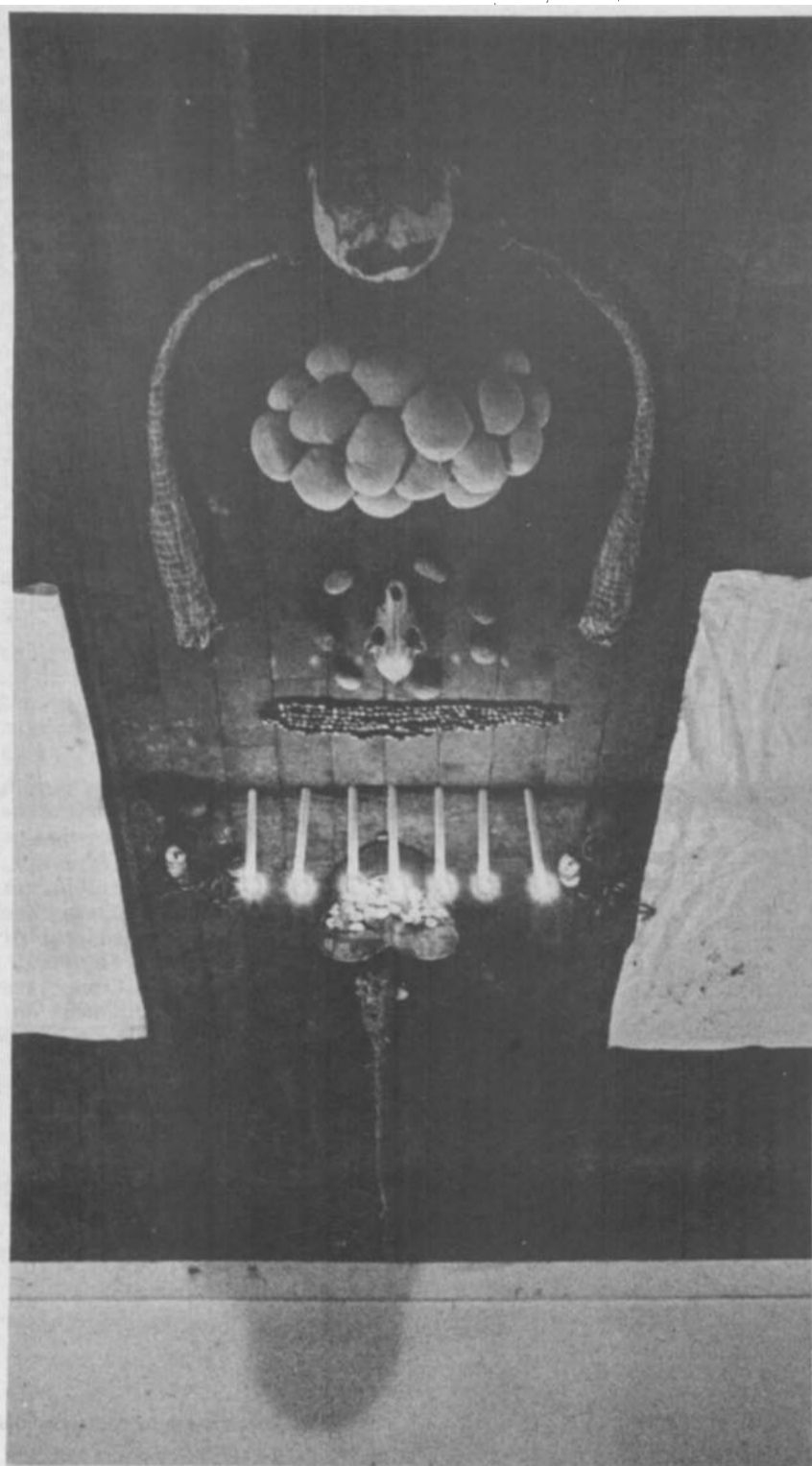


ART

THE BIRD AND THE DIRT



Fabric construction in shades of green, representing a leaf. Hung at the District Building. Photo by Link Harper.



Elements of works: wood lump, bound grasses, stones, skull, candles, sea snells and poisonous beads. Photo by Link Harper.

EXOTIC masks, stuffed ocelots, graves with bleeding hearts are the objects, but death, life and re-birth are the real materials used by The Bird and the Dirt. Jonas Santos and his friends reach back within themselves and working with street debris, creating beautiful and delicate works of art. Not content with one dimension, nor with one art form, they dance and draw, carve and arrange objects, combine music, ritual and poetry to reaffirm the essential nature of man.

Jonas Santos is from Brazil and he is searching for the equivalent of his native Carnival. A stranger here, he regrets our lack of a uniting, binding festival; he finds us divided, inhibited, and lacking in joy. At Carnival each person is an artist, each creates and contributes to the overall experience and Santos wants us to move in that direction. He is not altruistic, he creates his art as most men breathe, because he must.

This group has worked in Washington for four years, on street corners, in parks and even in the District Building. They have gone in extraordinary costumes, announced and unannounced, invited and uninvited to museum openings and art events. Each time the force of their work has dominated the scene. They challenge the orthodox art community both resisting it and courting it.

Most recently they presented a procession, dance and ritual dedicated to "Our Lady of Plastics" at Kalorama Park. It poured rain the night of the performance; they decked themselves in plastic, booties, ponchos, and strangely twisted hats and "related to the

In a previous exhibition and performance, they honored Yemanjá, the goddess of the waves and the moon. Santos explained that as the terrified Africans were taken by boat to be slaves in South America they worshipped her, hoping for assistance. Upon arrival in South America the strength of the myth was such that the Catholic Church absorbed rather than discarded it. Similarly other important gods became saints and rituals continued to be practiced. There is a similarity in tone to the Haitian style and even to Voodoo. There is an undertone in our culture of the same phenomenon, expressed in mediums, signifying, votive candles and other manifestations.

The artistic and the public content of Jonas Santos's work saves it from being a strange cult and allows the examination of environment. "In the city, rain is an annoyance, but Santos reminded us of its elemental and precious character, helped us to enjoy it much as children enjoy it, completely. A more unlikely group has probably never had a parade permit.

One man asked me if I was "with this group of tent caterpillars." I said "yes." Strange and fluid in their plastic draping, they danced and sang. This performance was sponsored by a number of people, including Alice Denney's Private Arts Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Fondo del Sol. Leaving the plaza at Kalorama Park they left behind the wet candles in their tuna tins. I wonder what the neighbors thought in the morning.

myths and ideas as old as man is old. He combines the elegant, the witty, the bizarre, the morbid and the luxurious and makes a unique statement. He works with dried bones, with stuffed animals, old mattresses, satins and silks, old rope, tuna-fish cans, herbs, incense, candles, sawed off turkey legs tied with red ribbons, and simple branches covered with bark that have a sculptural form and provide a unifying motif throughout his work. He carves simple dolls from pieces of wood and makes strange and basic instruments from tin.

His costumes are lavishly created, highly colorful and exotic. His work forms a unit and each performance has a theme. There seems always to be an absent Goddess, remote and beautiful. There are crosses, symbolic, anthropologists say, of the underworld, the earth, the past and the future. There are many candles, the symbol of flickering life, strange arrangements and repetitions, relating to concepts long forgotten in Western culture of the sacred qualities of certain numbers. What Jonas Santos understands that most of us have forgotten is that we are all alike in a basic way, all have a great capacity for beauty which is neglected in most of us, and also that we have an illogical side that we hopelessly try to rule out instead of appreciating. He understands we need ritual and celebrates this need. He acknowledges both death and life. He knows without ever looking it up, that we are bound to the earth and the ocean, that our bodies wax and wane with the tides. He is an artist outside of the usual tradi-

tions, but has achieved an avant garde mix; one that challenges, delights, frightens and stimulates.

To see his work, to talk with Jonas Santos, call his studio upstairs at 1734 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 332-1255. —CKW

LETTERS

WE have received a copy of your very interesting article on the "Art Now '74" (photocopy attached) and are concerned about the usage of our LEVI'S trademark which appears generically as "levis".

The LEVI'S word mark is our most priceless asset having been derived from the first name of our founder Mr. Levi Strauss who established the company back in 1850. Hundreds of millions of garments of all types have been shipped bearing the LEVI'S mark to virtually every country in the world, and many millions of dollars have been spent in advertising. LEVI'S refers only to products of our manufacture and to everything that we manufacture whether it be shirts, slacks, shorts, blouses, jackets, or blue jeans. We appreciate the fact that the LEVI'S trademark has become one of the half dozen best known in the world. In order to preserve this unique asset, it is necessary that we protect the mark from excessive usage where the trademark significance is not specifically noted.

Levi's is:

- Our ~~most~~ priceless asset
- a registered trademark in the U.S. Patent Office and over 100 countries
- derived from the first name of our founder who established our company in 1850
- our exclusive trademark which we apply to everything that we manufacture: jeans, slacks, jackets, shirts, skirts, etc.

Levi's should:

- always be spelled as it is registered with a capital "L" and an apostrophe " 's "
- never be used unless referring to garments manufactured by our company

We feel sure that it was not your intention to misuse our trademark and that you can appreciate our extreme caution in protecting it. Please help us to protect Levi's by always using and spelling it properly.

Thank you for your assistance.

Carol Yenne, Manager
Trademark Department

(We have xeroxed your letter and posted it by the coke machine — Ed.)

FILM

CLAUDINE

Reviewed by Paul Gewirtz

I SAW *Claudine* the day after Duke Ellington died. And as I watched this energetic but rather stiff movie about a Harlem mother of six, I remembered Ellington's famous description of his great piece, "Harlem Air Shaft:"

"So much goes on in a Harlem air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An air shaft is one great big loudspeaker. You see your neighbors' laundry. You hear the janitor's dongs. The man upstairs' aerial falls down and breaks your window. You smell coffee. A wonderful thing, that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast. One guy is cooking dried fish and rice and another guy's got a great big turkey. You hear people praying, fighting, snoring. Jitterbugs are jumping up and down always over you, never below you. I tried to put all that in 'Harlem Air Shaft'."

The music evokes varied ingredients, but its vitality and feeling are seamless and new. In *Claudine*, plenty of ingredients are there — indeed, too many ingredients — but they haven't been transmuted into a movie with life, magic and unity of its own.

Claudine Price, played by Diahann Carroll, is a beautiful thirty-six year old black woman living in Harlem with her six children. She has had two husbands and another two "almost marriages," and she claims to be off men — until she runs into huge and irresistible Roop Marshall (James Earl Jones). The story of their "love project" is surrounded by the chaos of Claudine's brimming and cramped household, Roop's fear of the responsibilities of family life, and the degrading effects of the welfare system. With mostly good humor, the two knock themselves into some kind of hopeful situation.

Roop takes Claudine out of the house and gives some joy to her nights, but Claudine feels guilt in being away from her children so often. Roop reintroduces Claudine to the

anguish of loving a man who is afraid of assuming the responsibilities of family life. Roop has children in two cities, but never sees them. On his first date with Claudine, Roop announces the finiteness of his intentions. Months later, he has a change of heart. But just as Roop is prepared to announce that he will marry, he is hit with a court judgment requiring him to make large support payments for his own children. Like Claudine, he is hemmed in by the errors of his younger self.

Many elements of modern black urban life, including its humor, are present in this movie, but, unfortunately, they have not been crafted into a good film. *Claudine* tries to be too many things — and it touches too many things with a heavy hand. It has a desperate energy and beleaguered appearance that fit its characters' lives, but never quite falls into place. It is awkwardly composed, as if someone had followed a checklist. The themes are authentic, the issues are authentic, the characters' predicaments are authentic. But the movie isn't.

A narrative film must create the illusion that the characters have ongoing lives, of which the camera sees only glimpses. But the events in *Claudine*'s world all seem to be manufactured for the camera. I didn't get a sense of the ordinary parts of the characters' lives — what they do in the stretch of unclimactic events. The characters aren't richly drawn, and, with the exception of James Earl Jones' Roop, they usually don't sound very natural. (The children in particular are saddled with many horrible lines.)

In fact every person in this movie is burdened by his or her thematic function. The characters have so many messages to pass on to us that they barely have time just to exist. One of the best scenes in *Claudine* is when two of Claudine's children, Paul and Francis, go bicycling through Harlem looking for Roop. The image of children pedalling hard through narrow spaces between moving turks conveys their vulnerability and eagerness to break loose much more persuasively than any set speech could — and it is much more exciting visually.

This outdoors scene also reminds us how oddly insulated from the surrounding Harlem world the story and its characters are. Most of the film takes place indoors. Missing is the sensual immediacy that a feeling for place might have created. The windows are never open. We never hear the sounds of the air shaft.

ARTS NOTES

ART

THE Corcoran Gallery of Art will present its 19th Area Exhibition Oct. 12-Nov. 10. Recent paintings, sculpture, drawing and prints by area artists. James Pilgrim of the Metropolitan Museum in NY is juror.

IN an era when artists and museums are usually on opposite sides of a picket line, the Corcoran's director, Roy Slade has made a landmark agreement with the local Artist's Equity, according to president Bert Schmutzthart. Although Equity is opposed in principle to fees for shows, they recognize the Corcoran is in financial trouble and consequently they have agreed not to object to the 19th Area Exhibition fees (\$5.00 an entry) and to sit down together after the show and assess whether or not there has been a profit. If

so the money will be returned in some form to Washington area artists — possibly in a fee-less show. Schmutzthart emphasizes the importance of this show to local artists and their appreciation of it and of Roy Slade's agreement. —C.K.W.

ATTENTION WEAVERS!: Two Guatemalan Indian Weavers, members of a large weaving cooperative in Comalapa, Guatemala will be at the Textile Museum main gallery, Oct. 2 from 1 to 4 p.m. They will demonstrate their highly advanced back strap loom techniques. Info: 667-0441.

JOAN GIESECKE

informal photographs



color/black & white

544-0744
washington d.c.

SHOP TALK

Beginning with this issue, Jean Lewton becomes managing editor of the *Washington Review*, our arts supplement. All manuscripts, notices, questions and answers dealing with the arts should be directed to her. Jean will be assisted by an editorial committee consisting of Richard King, Andrea Dean and Gordon Fletcher.

Also with this issue, Gordon Fletcher becomes music editor of the *DC Gazette* and *Washington Review*.

Gazette contributor Larry Cuban has been named superintendent of schools in Arlington County.

"JOINT" CONFERENCE — new literary magazine of inmate writings and art. Subscriptions: \$4.00 for 4 issues, \$2.00 for prisoners; single copy \$1.50. Order from King Publications, P.O. Box 19332, Washington, D.C., 20036.