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**Marc Blane at Paula Allen Gallery**

by Calvin Reid

Marc Blane's work has long embodied a dissatisfaction with the austere products of high modernism; at the same time, Blane shrewdly uses modernist strategies and the gallery context to extract an elemental and elegant truth from the urban social realities that loom beyond the world of art. The largest pieces in this recent show were reduced-scale basketball courts, sculptural schematics of the municipal playground. Constructed of rusting steel, the courts come complete with drilled-out backboards (to reduce wind resistance and possible storm damage) and netless hoops. The hoops are about 5 feet high.

These pieces promote a reexamination of the larger social impact of the extravagantly popular city game. Within these gallery mock-ups of the asphalt playground, Blane suggests the possibilities of escape from the urban dilemma the game affords, and the metaphor of confinement that the playground, in this chainlink fence enclosure, can also provide.



Four Lines – 13" x 37" x 8" – cement, galvanized wire screen, acrylic paint

Blane also presented smaller works that continue his theme of archeological reexamination of contemporary ruins. Model-sized handball and basketball courts about a foot high, they generate a different kind of elegy to decaying neighborhoods. Fastidiously constructed of wire-reinforced concrete, carefully painted, they come across as somewhat escapist, and their extreme miniaturization tends towards ingratiation rather than the sharp, challenging commentary of his larger forms.

Blane's formal vocabulary has always been steeped in enlightened urbanism; this is his great strength. In works going back to the "Times Square Show" of 1980, he has examined the rubble-strewn lots and empty structures of the South Bronx and the Lower East Side to extract an urban iconography that transforms our perceptions of the city's decline. In the "Times Square Show", a work like *Abandoned Buildings*, 1980-81, illustrates his poetic recycling of urban detritus; each drained wine bottle in a boxed case has a photo of a derelict tenement inserted into it. A more recent piece, called *Sphere*, 1985 (it was on view here in the back room), is about the size of a basketball, and is constructed of asphalt, concrete and bottle caps.

Such quirky objects as these, presented in a gallery space, produce a happy and resonant conflict between insular estheticism and the sprawling vigor that characterizes even the city's most blighted spaces. Blane manages quite ingeniously to connect our own urban plight with the great history of troubled civilizations. When he places his striking emblems of city life in the contemplative aura of the gallery, he gives them new rhetorical life.