

# In the eyes of a master curator

By Peter Frank  
Special to the Press-Telegram

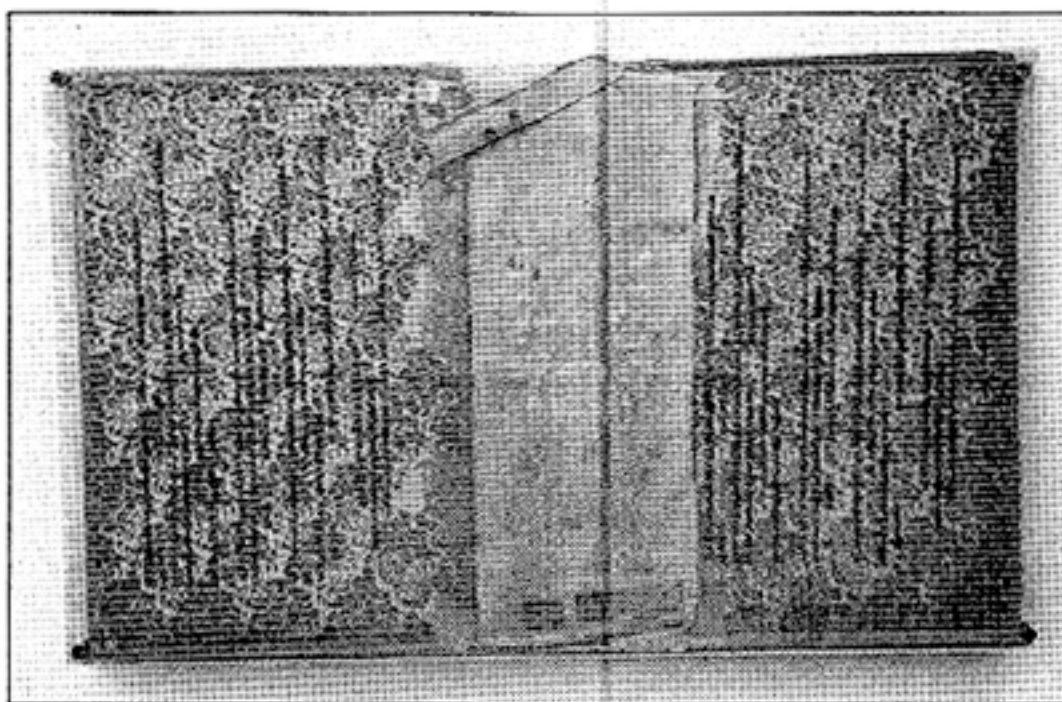
The name Josine Ianco-Starrels is virtually synonymous with art in the Los Angeles Basin. Best known for her curatorial stints at the Long Beach Museum of Art and Los Angeles' Municipal Art Gallery, Ianco-Starrels has been active as an exhibition organizer and critic for more than 40 years.

From the outset, she has supported the region's many styles and types of art. The daughter of Marcel Janco, one of the founders of Dadaism, she has definite tastes and can be outspoken; but she has been an unflagging champion of emerging artists of all stripes.

Like any good curator, especially one who works free-lance these days, Ianco-Starrels does a lot of exhibition judging. She does not simply pull together a show of disparate, perhaps mismatched items that happen to please her. Ianco-Starrels believes an exhibition must make coherent sense to the viewer.

## WAM

That belief is at work in two exhibitions for which she served as juror: the WAM show at the Downey Museum of Art and the members' exhibition at the Angels Gate Cultural Center. The selection of artists from WAM — a local, very active organization of women artists — and at Angels Gate seems measured and logical in the interaction of their components. The WAM exhibit concentrates on large, figural pictures and small abstract collages, while the Angels Gate show emphasizes sculptural assemblage and installation.



**Gossamer essay:** Barbara Blatt's "Wrdlss No. 3" is on display at Angels Gate Cultural Center.

The WAM show divides neatly down the middle. The front rooms are filled with stark, powerful renditions of apparently ordinary humans. Ordinary in identity, that is, but the scale is heroic and, in Chantal Menser's case, filled with a passion that bespeaks torment and tragedy. Menser's painted and drawn depictions are expressionist in spirit but quasi-realist in style, maintaining a muted brown-gray palette to set off that much more the intensity of screaming faces, bent bodies and ominous skulls. Joan Mueller, by contrast is expressionist in style but quasi-realist in spirit. Her chunky, bright-hued faces and full figures have a certain compositional gravity, but are otherwise light-hearted.

As you move into the museum's nether rooms, the scale suddenly drops, and the subject matter dissolves or explodes into shards. Judy Miller's engaging gouache-

and-collage combinations integrate images of auto parts with intimations of the landscape in a subtle but unmistakable comment on nature. Patrice Hughes does not employ collage, but her earth- and gold-toned paintings, in which a leaf — or is it an abstracted face? — floats half-observed, evince a tactile sensuousness.

## Angels Gate

The sensuousness of materials clearly attracts Ianco-Starrels; it is a leitmotif running through the Angels Gate exhibit. Indeed, Ianco-Starrels here downplays pictoriality almost entirely in favor of installations, assemblages and other formats that capitalize on the poetry and poignancy of "real stuff." The occasional painting or photo or work on paper gets lost among the room-filling arrangements.

The best room-size piece is Derek Seelig's darkened space.

## ART REVIEW

**WAM:** Downey Museum of Art, 10149 Rives Ave., (310) 861-0419. Through Oct. 23.

**"On Site at the Gate '94":** Angels Gate Cultural Center, 3601 S. Gafey St., Building A, San Pedro, (310) 519-0936. Through Oct. 23.

Around the perimeter, at shin height and suspended out from the wall, hang backlit photos of domestic images. A black geometric form has been rendered on the wall above each photograph. The allure is that of buried meaning — a kind of mental texture.

Ironically, the small stuff makes the best impression — not because the larger works are bad, but because the physical concentration of smaller formats brings out the lyricism in the work. Among the best are Barbara Blatt's gossamer essays in layering, Lynne Mori's delicate but emphatically geometric formations of differently colored and printed papers, and especially Rafael Perea de la Cabada's intimate yet forceful painting-drawing collages. On this scale, at least, Perea de la Cabada is a versatile master of material.

Also impressive in two dimensions is Emanuel Tet's witty color-photo sequence (in which a plate of rice and veggies gets progressively embellished with nails, an angel, etc.). **Nena Amsler's** free-hanging sheet of heavy paper, besides being riddled in a lively way with imprimings, applications and holes, boasts the show's best title: "PMS/Post Modern Syndrome."

*Peter Frank is a Los Angeles free-lance writer.*