



The styles used by Martin Johnson in *Forty-four Four by Fours* (left) and David Szafranski in *High Visibility Barrier* have little in common, but both artists won \$10,000 Northern Telecom fellowships.

## Artists recycle discards for varied effects

By Janet Kutner  
Art Critic of The Dallas Morning News

ARLINGTON — The recycling process is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness that even people with totally different impulses do it almost by second nature. This can

### ART REVIEW

produce some odd results when the people in question are artists.

Take the wildly different styles of David Szafranski, Martin Johnson and Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier, the artists who are subjects of the Arlington Museum of Art exhibit "New Works Fellowships: Northern Telecom." About the only thing the three have in common aside from their recycling tendencies is the fact that each won a \$10,000 fellowship from Northern Telecom, the international telecommunications company that sponsored the competition among artists in the South.

Dallas artist David Szafranski deals in pure abstraction, despite his unusual choice of nylon lawn-chair webbing, flocked ribbon and theater tickets as materials. And though his "paintings" are made by a weaving process not unlike that children use to make looped pot-holders, the exacting overall patterns he achieves are as effective as the most carefully rendered oils-on-canvas.

Adhering to the strict format of a grid, Mr. Szafranski creates myriad effects. Depending on the color and texture of the material itself, he can produce dazzling optical illusions or sensuous seas of color. In short, he can, through ingenious manipulation of lowly materials, create tightly integrated compositions that are just as deserving of the term "high art" as the minimalist canvases found in major museums throughout the world.

Terms like minimalist and reductive simply don't apply in the case of Martin Johnson, a Virginia Beach, Va., artist who carries excess to the extreme. His section of the show is a virtual clutter of broken

toys, kitsch souvenirs and other miscellanea that he has accumulated from junk shops, flea markets and discount stores.

Jammed together into dense wall reliefs or cacophonous sculptural tableaux, these discards serve as harsh reminders of our consumer culture. Although some semblance of order is attempted, chaos reigns and the visitor feels as though he has stumbled upon the remnants of a lost civilization in which nothing of much value was produced.

Atlanta artist Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier doesn't recycle things so much as memories. Accompanied by elaborate texts that are partly works of literature and partly her own creations, her hand-tinted photographs are complex narratives relating to her African-American heritage and to the fictional characters such as Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

By blending painting, photography and literary sources, Ms. Marshall-Linnemeier blurs distinctions among artistic categories in an effort to enrich the layered meaning of her artworks. But her link to the storytelling tradition of the South is so strong that she often allows the written word to dominate the visual image, forcing viewers to read their way through her art.

She has a tendency toward visual overload as well, and some of her photographs are so heavily embellished with decorative motifs and symbolic elements of a surreal nature that they detract from the central focus. Much of this effect is intentional, of course, because the role Ms. Marshall-Linnemeier has assumed requires her to deconstruct history as she knows it and fabricate it anew.

If Mr. Szafranski comes off as the strongest talent here, it's not simply because his work is the easiest to assimilate. His is a truly eccentric vision, and he displays an uncanny ability to come up with fresh solutions to staid compositional problems. The fact that he uses mass-produced materials merely makes the challenge that much greater.

A man of many talents, Mr. Szafranski successfully juggles two careers, one as a chemical engineer and the other as an artist. He also runs *Gray Matters*, the gallery he started here several years ago, which is consistently one of the liveliest venues in town. Few area artists are as deserving of the Northern Telecom award.

The touring exhibit was organized by the City Gallery of Contemporary Art in Raleigh, N.C., which invited three other institutions to participate — the Arlington Museum, the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville and the Nexus Contemporary Art Center in Atlanta.

Each nominated 20 candidates for the three fellowships, which were awarded by a national panel of jurors. In addition to recommending Mr. Szafranski, Arlington Museum director Joan Davidow also nominated five of the eight artists named to honorable mention. Each of those artists — Helen Altman, Jesse Amado, Otis Jones, David Mackie and Marcos Rosales — is concurrently showing a small sampling of works.

### EXHIBITION INFORMATION

"New Works Fellowships: Northern Telecom" is on view through Jan. 7 at the Arlington Museum of Art, 201 W. Main in Arlington. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Admission is free. For more information call (817) 275-4600.