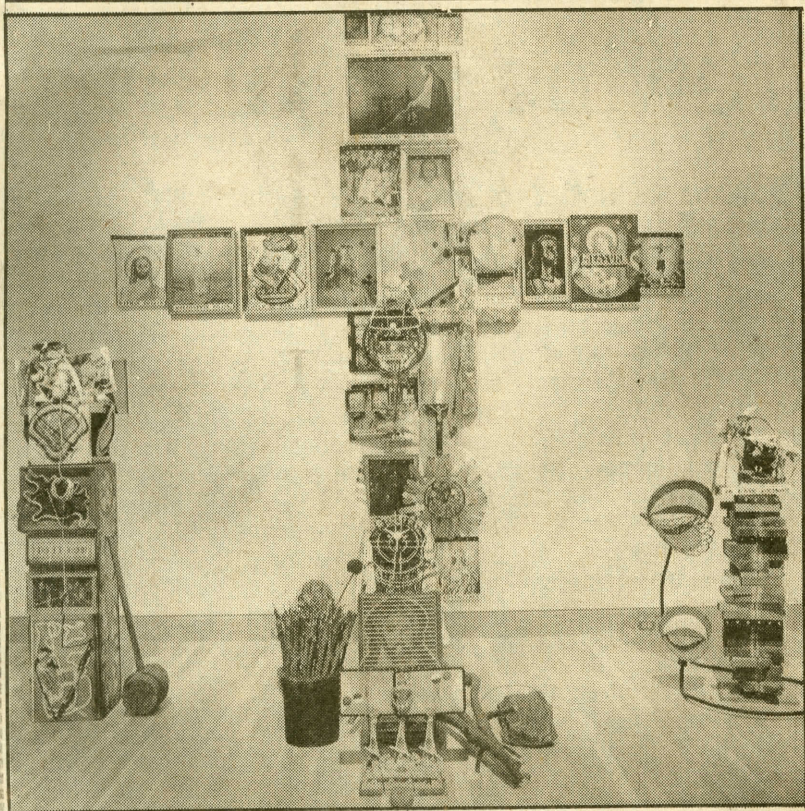


ART



Martin Johnson's "Glimpsatone," like many of his works, is crowded with objects and activity.

Johnson explores joys of ambiguity in works

By George Tussing

Special to *The Daily Break*

MARTIN JOHNSON, a nationally recognized Virginia Beach artist, is having an important show at the Peninsula Fine Art Center in Newport News.

He leaves no stone unturned in presenting the joys of ambiguity.

Walking into the gallery is not like entering most familiar-style art shows in Hampton Roads. Johnson's "Glimpsatone" has an overwhelming number of THINGS; walls are crowded with pictures hung frame to frame from floor to ceiling and end to end.

Johnson spent 30 hours installing the show, and when he finished, took away eight boxes of unused things. His productivity is staggering.

The exhibit is composed mostly of the recycled detritus of our throw-away society. The artist has given new life to these discards by altering and arranging them in a new, often disturbing, sometimes humorous and always disorienting context.

Johnson scours flea markets and yard sales for the grist of his art. The pictures on the walls are by anonymous artists — most of them pretty bad. There are even "paint by numbers" pictures.

Each picture is framed and in some way partially painted over by Johnson. At the top of each runs a horizontal black strip with white dots, signifying time. Across the bot-

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toms on white strips are stenciled letters. The visual image in between is where we live and perceive but only darkly, through a glass.

The ambiguity and irrationalism of Johnson's art are a legacy of the surrealism of the 1920s that sought to give us a glimpse of the unconscious.

On the left wall of the Peninsula gallery is the board that provided Johnson his confrontation with the transcendent, the epiphany experience that changed his life in 1974.

Johnson was an architecture student at Virginia Tech when he found a discarded board holding some paint cans. The texture of the board fascinated him, and so did the word "for." He was fascinated by the potential resonances of three such simple letters and their possible rearrangements and contexts.

The lack of clarity in modern life and art is the unsolved dislocation in our lives, and Johnson points them out to us. His art tells us to just keep looking, and we can always come to different conclusions.

"Glimpsatone," an installation of painting and sculpture by Martin Johnson, will remain on view through Feb. 18 at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Museum Drive, Newport News. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Call 596-1875.