

In New Haven, Art's Just Around the Corner

By JENNIFER DUNNING

There's a real element of serendipity in a new, free art show in New Haven: turn a corner, and then a crank, and you get a celebration of a city.

Nine metal boxes will be found starting today on lampposts and bus signs all over town offering a month-long peep show that combines three-dimensional pop art and poetry. And unlike the peep shows that are anathema to New York City, all of New Haven's show is engaging and none of it salacious.

The Greeks called such boxes zoeotropes or phenakistiskons. To its creators, this environmental art show is simply poetry-box sculpture. Adventurous passers-by who pause to look into the peep holes are rewarded with a sometimes zany, sometimes dreamlike revolving streetscape.

Using bits of found objects like paper plates, children's toys, combs, plastic flowers and bicycle-parts, Robert Taplin, a 26-year-old artist, has created a kaleidoscopic pop-art view of the city.

A Tour of New Haven

Mixed with the visual effects is poetry by Daniel Wolff, a 26-year-old writer. It tells the story of an obsessive search for a lost love through the streets of New Haven. "She was everywhere," the message reads on a rising mirror-silver of a moon at one downtown bus stop.

More than just a piece of public art, the sculptures provide a tour of New Haven. Starting at City Hall and ending up at the waterfront, the shows are placed at sites throughout the city so that while each show may be seen alone, by following all nine through the town the viewer sees nine very different areas of New Haven.

Each scene is a representation of the street where it stands. "This is the

place," the poem's refrain reads. "It happened here."

Mr. Taplin and Mr. Wolff have long been interested in the idea of public art. "People don't have to worry about street sculptures as works of art or make the conscious decision involved in going to a museum," Mr. Wolff said. "And it's all meant to be touched."

"We both like New Haven a lot. It's a wonderfully evocative city that hasn't neaten itself up. It maintains evidence of its history. We had the notion that a lot has happened and will happen here."

Friends warned them that the sculptures might be vandalized, but neither Mr. Taplin nor Mr. Wolff is worried. "People say that nothing on the street lasts," Mr. Wolff said. "Our theory is that if it is commemorative of the

neighborhood and is fun, people will not destroy street sculpture."

"And it's all junk," Mr. Taplin added. The casings, which were suggested by the metal-work surrounding "Don't Walk" street signs and old telephone booths, are made of pieces of backyard junk like abandoned hibachi grills and furnace blowers, as well as hardware-store tote boxes.

"I like the qualities of some of these pieces, the rust and all that," the artist said. "And," Mr. Wolff added, "they look like the street itself."

Scenario for Project

The sculptor and the poet, who were high school friends, had drifted apart in recent years. Mr. Taplin to create environmental wind sculptures in his New Haven factory studio and Mr. Wolff to finish a book of poetry in Mamaroneck, N.Y., his home town. The

two decided it would be fun to work on a project together again and Mr. Wolff came up with a scenario.

The nine poetry-box sculptures began to take shape a year and a half ago, when the two men were awarded a grant of \$1,000 from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. The project also has the blessing of Frank Logue, New Haven's art-conscious Mayor. "Please don't call them peep shows, though," he said worriedly.

On Oct. 20 the boxes will vanish from the streets as suddenly as they appeared. Do the two plan to create "peep shows" for other cities? Mr. Wolff reports that a trial run of the show was a great success on Manhattan's Lower East Side, but both men say they look forward to a respite from the work.

"The trouble with this," Mr. Wolff said wistfully, shaking his head, "is that it's addictive."



Robert Taplin, left, and Daniel Wolff with one of their poetry-box sculptures. At right: scene in "Dixwell Avenue" box.

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