

# ARTWEEK

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## ECHOES OF FOLK ART

Scottsdale / Victoria Beaudin

In the late seventies, Ron Gasowski began experimenting with color xerography. He reproduced icons of American popular culture—pin-up girls, cartoon characters, plastic dolls, advertisements, photographs of political figures and mass-produced items—in garish colors and placed them in bizarre juxtapositions. The conjunction of these incongruous images, like the montages found in Sergei Eisenstein film, created direct comments that were humorous, satirical and biting. For example, a work such as *A Rose Is a Rose, Is a Rose, Is a Fish* is loaded with sexual overtones that go beyond the obvious double exposure of the pin-up girl and the placement of a fish across her legs.

Because xerography limited the size of the reproductions Gasowski could make, he turned to the creation of quiltlike pieces in which many separate images were combined in an orderly fashion and stitched together with colorful thread. Thus, the vanguard was placed within a

traditional folk-art context. Those works can be thought of as the backdrop against which we see Gasowski's latest work, a series of ceramic and cement sculptures on exhibit at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts. As dissimilar as their mediums are, both the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional works remain faithful to Gasowski's predilection for folk and found art. The difference is that Gasowski is now making pieces that are truer to the folk-art tradition.

The colors in Gasowski's two-dimensional works were often glaring, emphasizing the extremes that modern technology can produce; the colors in the sculptural works are complementary. There is nothing jarring about them, though they are bright—combining, for example, lime green with pink. Two of the works are in muted browns and blues, which creates esthetically pleasing sculptures that encourage us to examine all the objects embedded in the cement. Beer bottles, tire

frames and hub caps—remnants of the artist's interest in "popular" motifs—are found in several of the pieces.

It is the ceramic subject matter, however, that offers the unexpected element. Gasowski made most of the ceramic pieces, and tiny hearts, wings, embossed words and faces can be found in them. Some of the shards have decorative patterns, but the majority are single-colored works that play off against one another.

When one looks at the body of the work, a sense of appropriateness to this Southwest region is apparent. It is evident that the sculptures are meant to be placed outside. Their colors are bright and vivid, and the shards are reminiscent of Mexican pottery. Although not confined to this region, hot-rod cars—one of Gasowski's motifs—have been identified with the West Coast. The shapes of many of the works are even reminiscent of cacti.

Gasowski has absorbed these various images and blended them together. A tes-



Ron Gasowski, *Quack, Quack Quilt*, 1982, color xerox and mixed media on paper, 33"x 32", at Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Scottsdale.

tament to his skill is that he has refused to intellectualize his knowledge but has, instead, chosen to keep his approach simple and true to the folk-art tradition. □