

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK

Magdalena Jetelová at John Weber

A Czech sculptor who has lived in West Germany since 1985, Magdalena Jetelová is best known for her gigantic, primitivistic furniture and bizarrely warped architectural structures made from massive rough-hewn wooden beams. This show, Jetelová's third appearance in New York, consisted not of individual sculptures but of two environmental installations. It presented a different side of the artist, one more conceptual and complex but less readily engaging.

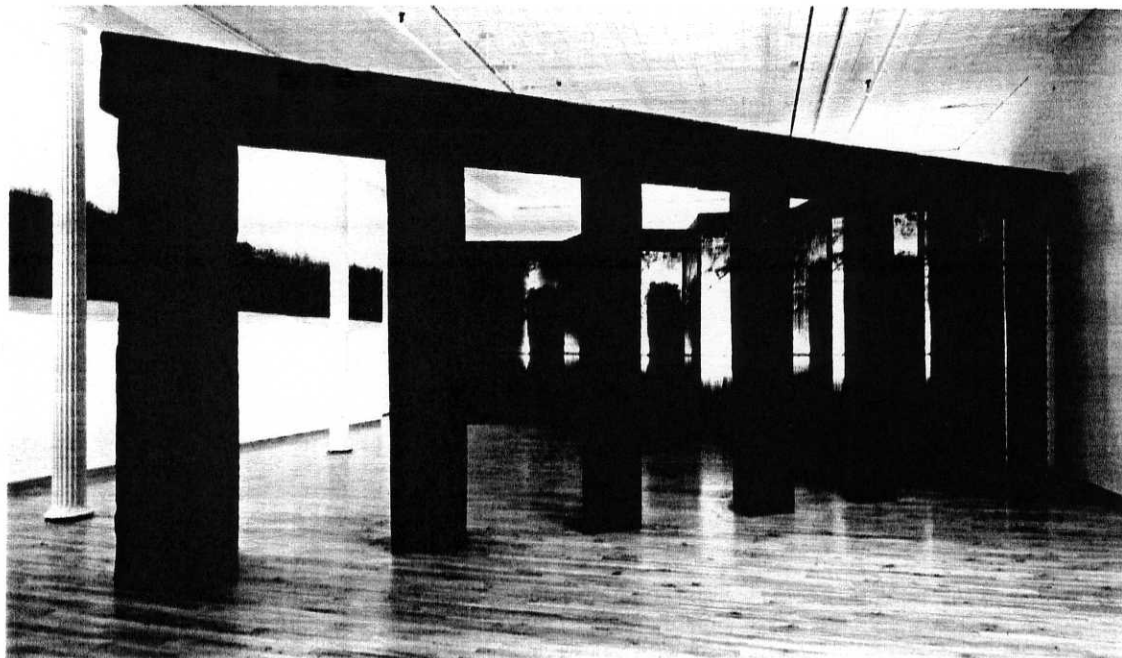
"Demystification of a Monument" was composed of three major elements arranged in a triangle. One side was a post-and-lintel framework made of enormous charred beams standing about 10 feet high in a row extending diagonally across the gallery. A second side was an accordion-fold screen made of multiples of an indecipherably blurry black-and-white photographic transparency. The structure of this screen echoed the post-and-lintel elements as the repeated, vertical-format photograph created a pattern of brights beneath a long horizontal. The third side of the triangle was a long, narrow piece of paper attached to the wall. The paper had been blackened by candle smoke and into the soot lines from T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," as used by the Czech poet

Haukova, were repeatedly inscribed by hand in English and another language: "Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future, and time future contained in time past."

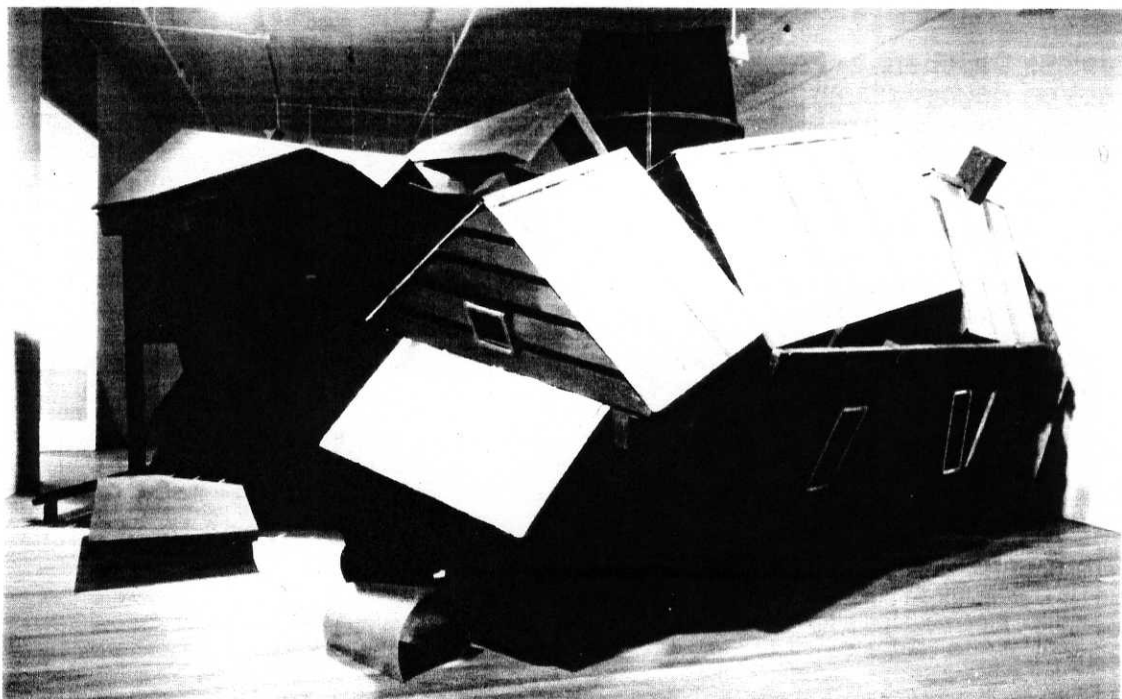
Notwithstanding its title, this was a decidedly mystifying work of sculpture. In its material ambition, moody darkness and enigmatic, portentous iconography, it called to mind some of the works

Anselm Kiefer. Jetelová is taking on big themes, brooding on time and destruction.

The second installation was called "Domestication of a Pyramid." In a corner of the gallery, dust-colored earth was piled to form a triangular plane tilting from the floor to an apex near the ceiling. At the high point, however, exposed plywood revealed that this was not a solid pile of earth but a layer over a wooden



Magdalena Jetelová: Installation view of "Demystification of a Monument," 1989-90, mixed mediums; at John Weber.



James Casebere: "Tree Trunk with Broken Bungalow and Shotgun Houses," 1989; at Vrej Baghoomian. (Review on p. 170.)

structure. On the wall nearby was a picture of a dark, smudgy inverted triangle (it was, in fact, a large photograph made by means of laser technology). As you studied the installation in the darkened gallery, a bright red laser beam drifted slowly across the wall from the photograph to the dirt. When it almost reached the dirt, it disappeared, and then

reappeared on the photograph, to repeat the movement. Here was another intriguing juxtaposition of imposing physicality and ghostly immateriality, as well as a rather obscure philosophical meditation on time and monumentality. More abstract than the other installation, it was also less metaphorically suggestive, as Jetelová seemed more involved

with form, technology and process.

This exhibition demonstrated both technological inventiveness and an undeniable sculptural power. But thematically, it projected a somewhat off-putting self-conscious weightiness. I couldn't help feeling that Jetelová may be trying too hard to be profound, which is why this show

