

REVIEW/ART: TRANSCENDENTAL AUTO HOODS

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Transcendental auto hoods

POINT OF PASSAGE - An installation of 70 automobile hoods by Dan Devine. Helen Shlien Gallery, 354 Congress St., Boston.

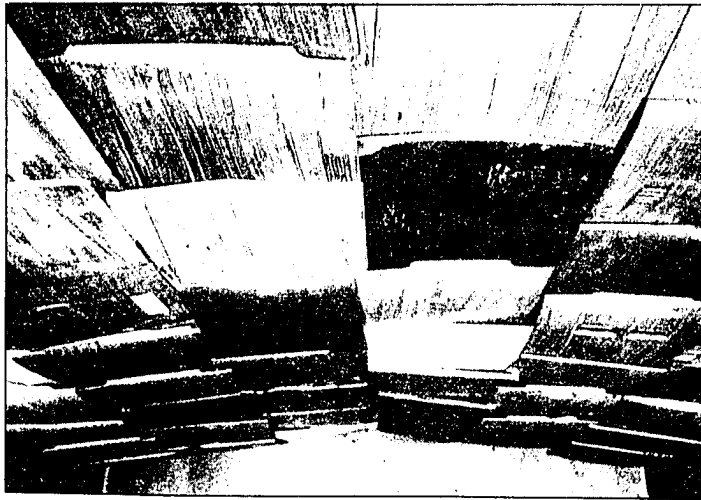
through August. The gallery is closed Sundays and Mondays.

By Robert Taylor
Globe Staff

Why a man would collect and document the background of 70 automobile hoods and then construct them into a kind of canopy like the sound baffles of the Tanglewood Music Shed may puzzle or even outrage someone who has never set foot inside an art gallery. But Dan Devine's installation, "Point of Passage" is both subtle in its conception and serious in its intentions.

As an example of its subtlety, consider the treatment of color in the hoods, for the artist has applied, in most instances, oil paints. As one walks beneath the structure of overlapping rectilinear shapes there are gradual color transitions from warm to cool; but as one turns about and prepares to leave, the glare of floodlights hits the eye, and the color, draining out of the hoods, becomes an even flat chrome dazzle.

As an example of its seriousness, consider the role of the automobile in our culture. To enlarge upon this is probably unnecessary. Regarded as a sign or symbol, it has inspired semiologists, or analysts of the meaning of signs, like Roland Barthes. Whether one looks upon



A section of "Point of Passage," Dan Devine's installation of 70 auto hoods at the Helen Shlien Gallery through August.

PHOTO BY DAVID L. RYAN

the automobile from the standpoint of consumerism or as an extension of the sensibility of the age, it most certainly embodies a multitude of references.

Devine, too, has heeded the space of the gallery, for like all installations, sculptures made for a particular site, the work is partially architectural. We look up at the hoods and the variety of their patinas and surfaces, rusty and dented and scarred, as we might look up in a cathedral. The space, though, is enclosed, like the space of a cave or a wigwam, and the arrangement of the hoods slanted, so that as one advances toward the far edge, space constricts. You don't interact with the piece to a great extent. The achievement of "Point of Passage" is to offer a number of plausible, coexisting interpretations and choices.

For instance, the hoods are not a complete enclosure, but stop short of the gallery wall. A small barrier containing the floodlights places a boundary between the spectator and the metal sheets. A choice is offered. Active or passive?

Should you advance into the room, at least as far as you can, and watch the shifts that occur in perception, how your shadow defines you in relation to the hoods, where you stand as it were? Or should you study the hoods from behind the barrier, aloof, detached from the visual action? An automobile is a state of mind, like the comments, profane, grave and pungent, of the auto body workers recorded by the artist. Dan Devine's installation suggests a complex world in which the automobile assumes the status of myth.