

ART REVIEW

## Youth and Experience Transforming a Town

By GRACE GLUECK

ANDOVER, Mass. — The artist Jason Middlebrook took a look around Andover, a spacious, tree-hugged town that's home to the elite preparatory school Phillips Academy (founded in 1778) and as New England as it gets. He observed students, architecture, cars, clothing and other elements common to the area.

Then, plunk in front of the elegant brick Victorian town hall, he installed a wooden deck where anyone can sit to watch specific examples. An illustrated plaque, like that found in zoos, portrays a dog, a butterfly, a squirrel, plants, the Great American Truck and other elements coexisting with people in the Andover universe.

Mr. Middlebrook's witty watch post is one of the better contributions to a nine-artist collaboration that includes Mel Kendrick, Lee Mingwei, Jessica Stockholder, Andrea Zittel,

"Sitelines: Art on Main," organized by the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy, (978) 749-4015, is on view in Andover, Mass., through Sept. 29.

Arthur Ganson, Mark Dion, Abelardo Morell and Nari Ward. Invited a year ago by Phillips's Addison Gallery of American Art to work with students from the academy and 10 local public schools, they produced "Sitelines: Art on Main," a group of temporary installations — mostly outdoors — on the campus and at various points along the town's Main Street.

The idea was to connect the academy and the wider community, "physically and metaphorically," with projects that explore the area's history, geography and culture. Students took part by brainstorming with the artists, helping to scout objects, designing components of some works and becoming involved in their construction. And they have a continuing attachment to the work, conducting visitors on walking tours and the like.

The concept for "Sitelines," hatched by Adam Weinberg, director of the Addison, can't be faulted. But like many group art endeavors, the results are uneven and sometimes off the track.

Besides Mr. Middlebrook's, the more engaging works include Mr. Mingwei's "Mosquito Cinema," an outdoor movie screen next to the art gallery. On Saturday nights at 9 it



Frank E. Graham/Addison Gallery of American Art  
Mel Kendrick's sculpture "Amphora (for Dudley Fitts) Parts A and B."

shows must-see films chosen by a poll of 300 high school students asked what they'd recommend to their international peers. Spectators are equipped with fans to fight heat and wave away mosquitoes. "Mosquito Cinema," more — to be sure — of a film fest than an art project, was inspired by the artist's childhood memories of seeing American movies in Temple Square, Taipei.

Another winner is a double tree sculpture by Mr. Kendrick, the only traditional object maker in the group. His work, "Amphora (for Dudley Fitts) Parts A and B," on the steps of the Addison's classical fa-

cade not far from a formal procession of elm trees that fronts it, is literally a tree stump turned inside out. He cored and stripped the bark from the stump, found in the Andover tree dump, blackened the shell and sliced it into horizontal layers separated by stick-out wooden shims.

The core was made into a companion piece, divided into hunks of raw wood that stand upright on a base of wood blocks. Less tree-like in its imagery, it was nevertheless obviously born from the surreal stump that straddles the gap between abstraction and realism.

Less impressive are the endeavors of Ms. Stockholder and Ms. Zittel. In an effort to transfer to a public space the pathway pattern of a highly trafficked quadrangle at the school, Ms. Stockholder "challenged the landscape" by laying down swaths of colored gravel and Astroturf on a peaceful lawn off Main Street, designed in 1928 by the landscape architect Charles Pratt. She painted part of a hedge green and added insult to injury with props like an old bathtub and stuffed furniture.

On another lawn close by, Ms. Zittel has compounded this public nuisance with a presentation aptly titled "sfnwvlei" ("something for nothing with very little effort involved"). It consists of 24 oblong metal trays set on posts in four orderly rows, each tray containing shredded litter mixed with water, wheat paste and pigment; these mixtures are meant to become decorative wall panels when dried in the sun. Alas, the damp New England climate has foiled the plan, leaving the trays full of grunge that looks more like swamp rot than the makings of décor.

A less invasive if cornier outdoor display is made by silvery ribbons wrapped around trees along Main Street, bearing printed messages like "Have love for yourself; let love come to you." They are products of a contraption more interesting than its results, the Thought-O-Graph, a hand-operated writing machine that prints on ribbon. It was devised by Mr. Ganson, a kinetic sculptor who worked on its fabrication with pupils from the Greater Lawrence Techni-

cal School. Students were then invited to write their own private thoughts for display on the trees. Unfortunately, the Thought-O-Graph is confined to the gallery, closed in August.

Unavailable, too, on my Sunday visit but viewable on a video that accompanies the show were three other works.

One is a group of pushcarts by Mr. Ward that roll up and down Main Street, laden with ethnic goods and sporting signs like "Buy Black" and "Buy Yellow," meant to satirize the perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes in consumer products.

Another is Mr. Dion's rearrangement of dollhouse miniatures in the collection of the Amherst Historical Society into sections of metalwork, furniture, ceramics, glass, etc., presumably to question traditional museum categorizations.

The third is the photographer Abelardo Morell's past-present look at Andover, enabled by a camera obscura made by darkening a room in the Andover Memorial Library, then cutting a small hole in fabric covering a window facing Elm Square. A view of the lively square is projected (upside down) in the venerable context of the library.

For the participating students this show was obviously valuable. But for the general public, is it worth a visit to Andover, 25 miles north of Boston? Well, yes, if you like gracious old New England towns with unpredictable artists turned loose in them.