

## SCENE

## "Dangling Modifier"

Santa Barbara News Press

December 3, 1999

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# Dangling 'Modifier'

BY MARINA WALKER

## REVIEW

Until spring or early summer of the year 2000, the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum and Miramar Hotel are joined in an effort to promote contemporary art via a temporary satellite exhibition space located in what, until recently, was the hotel's gift shop. The donated alternative space will remain open as a showcase venue until hotel renovations begin next year.

Using the hotel's history as source material for her special project, internationally recognized artist Jane Mulfinger creates "Dangling Modifier," a site-specific exhibition integrally related to the history of the beachfront property.

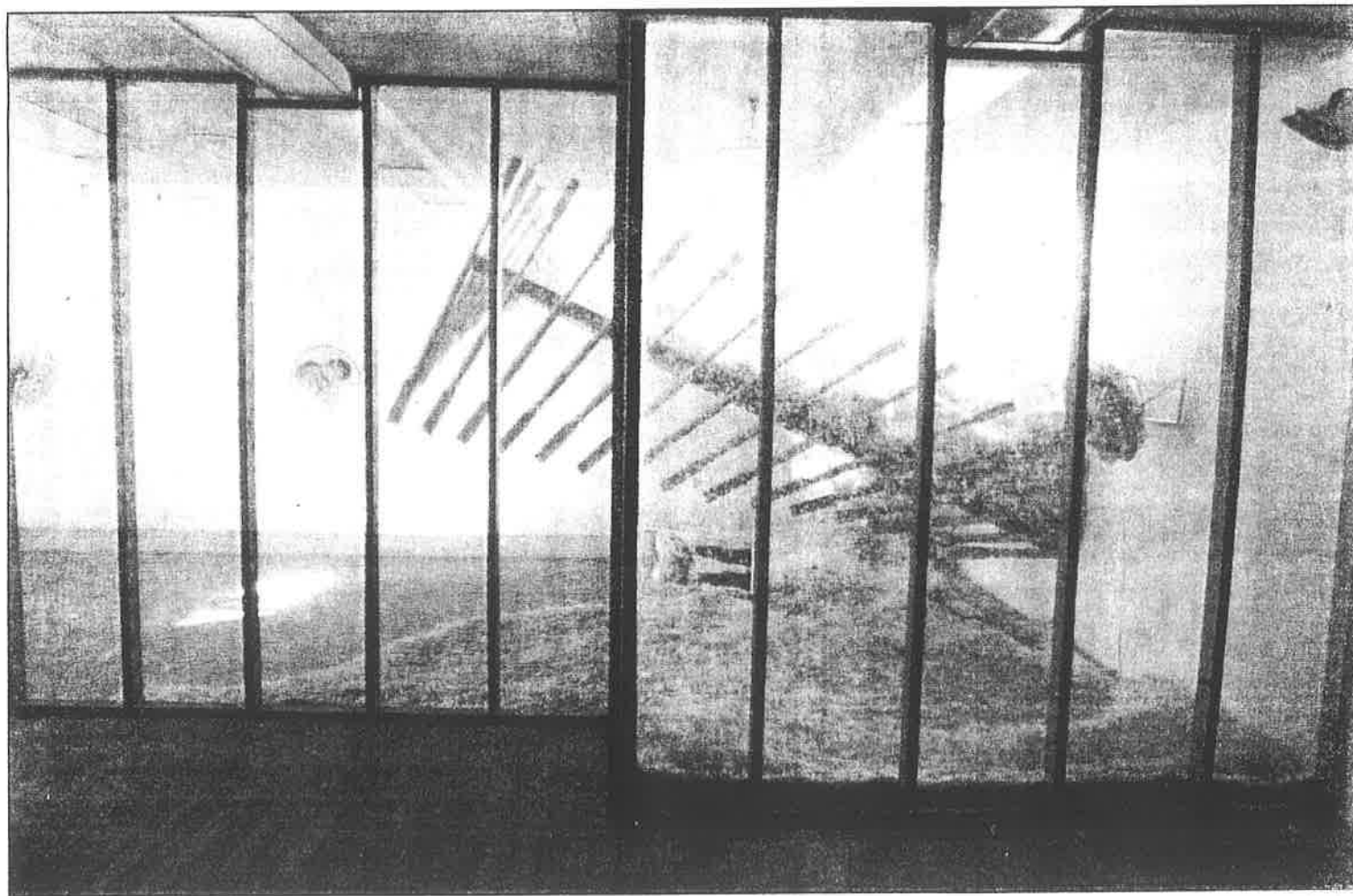
Little occupies the gutted, two-room gift shop but wood, wire, feathers (lots and lots of feathers), a pair of architecture-based etched drawings on glass, a back-lit photograph and a massive, cable-

suspended structure whose semi-horizontal bed-like shape suggests the movement of the sea. Wind coming from electric fans positioned in every corner of the room stirs the feathers, causing them to float and clump constantly regrouping themselves in relation to the wire partition that defines the limits of the exhibition space. In their forlorn, aimless movement, they at once amplify and animate the possibilities suggested by the pendulous construction.

No doubt primarily built to contain the feathers from blowing into the hotel

lobby, the wire boundary serves other conceptual purposes as well. The frame forms a vague, pseudo-protection for the artist-guided visitation into the property's past. It might also be seen as a cage, a giant metaphorical chicken coop for memories of the hotel's past, its former guests and other ghosts.

Turned sideways under the "bed-wave," the aforementioned back-lit photographic image gives the viewer a sentimental glimpse: A woman stands firm and barefoot in the surf, inspiring an impression of carefree days at the beach.



RAFAEL MALDONADO/STARS PRESS

"Dangling Modifier," Jane Mulfinger's site-specific exhibition at the former Miramar Hotel gift shop.

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reaching all the way back into the hotel's storied past and well into its future.

With its ambiguous references, the installation is an oblique and very personal statement in the extreme. The pieces

**Dangling Modifier**

**WHEN:** Through Jan. 2

**WHERE:** Miramar Hotel,  
1555 S. Jameson Lane in  
Montecito

**INFORMATION:** 966-5373

are unnamed and there is no artist's statement to guide us, which is not necessarily a deficit. However, it may render the show as a bit too stark to be definitively comprehended.

Accompanying the exhibit as its only written aspect is a timeline of the hotel's development from its earliest days in 1887 to 1964. There is no definitive claim put on the timeline so I

am not certain into whose domain it falls. With the Miramar still here and us about to step into a new millennium, one wonders why the timeline ends in 1964, at a time when Kennedy was not long dead, Viet Nam was raging, and the streets were awash with civil rights demonstrations and hippies. In any case, the text does not seem to relate directly to the show and clues as to Mulfinger's intent are most definitely left up to the viewer.

Wrenching the abstract or conceptual over into the theoretical or literal (while being the absolute prerogative of the viewer) can at the same time be the death of the mystery and beauty of non-representational art — so one must tread lightly.

Still, this show seems to stand on a multiplicity of levels (some literal, others profoundly abstract) not the least of which belongs to the complexity of the artist's creative mind. A guess is that while her journey here may be ostensibly grounded in historical inquiry regarding the Miramar Hotel, a primordial longing is the true emotional power source fueling her view.

In this very succinct show, the artist's sentiment is a journey paradoxically underwritten by Zen-like detachment in the etched glass pieces, balanced against a clearly stated involve-

ment in the bed-wave piece. This is perhaps a suggestion of the Universal Law of Polarity, of Yin and Yang, Male and Female, Action and Stasis, Expansion and Contraction juxtaposed.

If art has a function independent of its right to exist in the first place, one imagines that function to be to move the viewer into some new country that hasn't been known prior to encountering the work. If it is not just "art for art's sake," then it simply must not leave the viewer in precisely the same place as he/she was before walking through the door. It needs at a minimum, to educate, infuriate, unnerve, pleasure, enlighten, soothe, anger or surprise us — otherwise what is the point? Whatever happens, it must not move us into further boredom. This show will do — at least — one or more of those things for you. You decide which.

("Dangling Modifier" continues through Jan. 2 at the Miramar Artist Project Space, Miramar Hotel, 1555 S. Jameson Lane in Montecito. The installation will be open 24 hours a day. If the door is locked, the exhibition space is viewable from the front windows. For more information, call the Contemporary Arts Forum at 966-5373.)

*Free-lance writer Marina Walker reviews art regularly for Scene.*