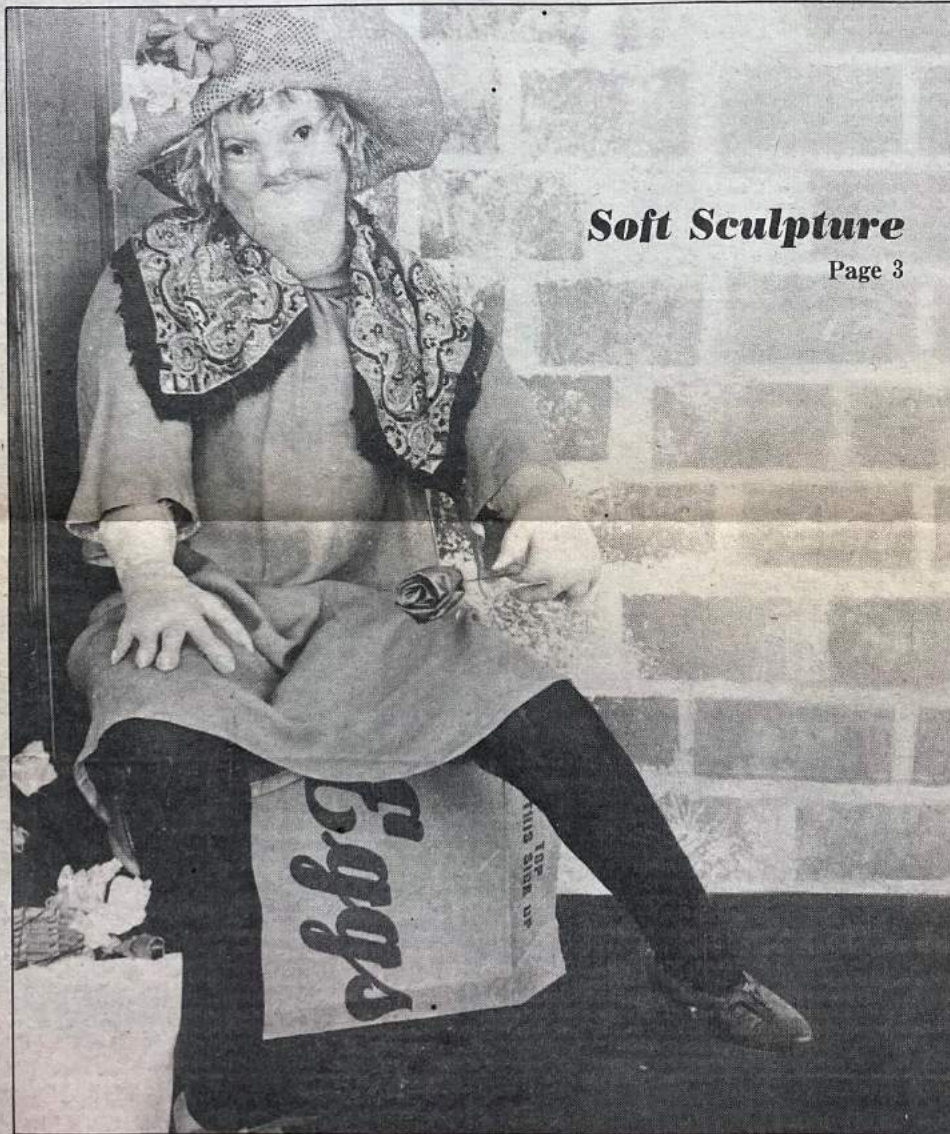


part II

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Soft Sculpture

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Newsday Photo by David L. Pokras

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Together. Designing couple proves that one and one can be more than two. **Pages 6-7.**

Old and new. Modern interiors get a touch of class with the use of antiques. **Page 5.**



Leo Seligsohn on Edward Mulhare: 'If there is such a thing as cool warmth, he has it as the insufferably self-involved-but-charming Henry Higgins.' **Page 32.**

Stuffed Shirts For Art's Sake

By Peter Goodman

The Doll-f'Inn is like many Long Island restaurants. The facade is ersatz brick, the bar is dim, fish nets hang from the walls and there is the obligatory tank filled with little red lobsters.

And then there are its patrons. Off in a corner table is Sylvia, drinking by herself, glasses pushed up on her hat, wearing an orange parka and jeans. She says nothing. At the bar sit Lavinia in pink and black, her dress slit up the thigh, and Maximilian Macho, hairy chest bulging out of his shirt. More silence.

In the dining room there are conversations, promising titillation for the shameless eavesdropper: "By the time Frank told me he was leaving for two months, I was so disillusioned with the relationship . . ." "I'm a big boy now; I've been divorced twice. I pay my bills . . ."

The Doll-f'Inn, more than a fish house, is a fishy house. Most of its denizens are stuffed. Like Sol, sitting at the bus stop with a beret perched on his bald head, and rotten little Eloise, and Fritz the chef, and the Girl Scout on Grandma's knee and Alice Longworth in the bathroom. They are made of wire and foam and stuffing.

There's Bartholomew the bartender, towering over his customers, startling blue eyes staring out of his fabric face. Bartholomew slowly turns out of his "What's yours, friend?" And the maitre d', toupee set clumsily on his head, asks you to wait for a table and then rushes off to argue loudly with the chef.

The Doll-f'Inn is an art show—what its makers call a "soft sculpture environment." Maximilian and Lavinia and Sylvia and the rest were created over a period of two months at Port Washington's Odin Gallery by a group learning how to make soft sculpture, that curious and flexible composite of fabric and old clothes put together over a soft framework.

To the sculpture were added a jukebox, tape-recorded sound effects and, on Sunday afternoons, a troupe of actors who call themselves the Knights of Racon. You can tell the actors from the sculpture because the live ones carry little coon tails.

The Doll-f'Inn was conceived by Annette Fisherman and Betty Gimbel, co-owners of the Odin Gallery, who wanted to run a soft-sculpture workshop and create an "environment." They met with artist Ariene Summers, who had carried the dream of doing the same thing ever since she saw a tiny "environment" of wood and papier mache in an Amsterdam museum.

They then assembled a crew that included several people who had never even sewn before and, working sometimes far into the night, taught them how to make the sculptures. The process was videotaped by Don Fizzignolia, with equipment borrowed from the Action Council of Central Nassau Inc. and the Hicksville Youth Council. So visitors to the gallery who go into the kitchen can, if they evade the chef's belligerent stare, watch the creation of what they have just seen.

The environment is meticulously detailed. A dessert table in the dining room contains a display of petit fours, made of brown-dyed sponge covered with satin that has been treated with glue to give it a glaze. There is a luscious-looking dish of clams on the half shell, made of fabric, and golden-brown fillet of sole. Some of the pots in the kitchen are made of metal, and some are not. There are eggs in a fabric frying pan.

All the sculptures have names and characters. Sus Sacher made Sylvia in the bar, who is named after Sacher's aunt. "I think she's a former schoolteacher whose husband died," Sacher said of her creation. "She's been thrust into the world of singles, and she's just not making it."

Maximilian Macho and Lavinia, made by Tracy Arnold, need no explanation. Beverly Halm made Fritz the chef, and she wanted him to be "large, gross, authoritarian. People crumble before him." (Halm made sure that Fritz' cleaver was made of fabric rather than metal, just to be safe.)

The Knights of Racon move from room to room, sometimes sitting with the stuffed diners, or flirt-



Newsday Photos by David L. Pokress

Regulars at the Doll-f'Inn include Dottie, top; Maximilian Macho, above with actress Sheila Elia; and chef Fritz, below. On the cover is Lottie the flower lady.

ing with Maximilian, or taking orders to Fritz. They are a troupe from Brookville, led by John Laruccia and Ania Krasinski, who usually perform outdoors at estates and open theaters. Why "Racon"? "Everybody likes the little fellers," Laruccia said.

The exhibition will be at the Odin Gallery, 322 Main St., Port Washington, through May 12, though the actors will only be performing from 2 to 5 PM tomorrow and May 4. Gallery hours are 11 AM-5 PM Tuesday-Sunday.

And, in a departure from usual gallery procedure, there is an admission charge for this show: \$1.50 for adults, \$1 for children from 8 to 18, free for children under 8. After all, Fisherman said, none of the work is likely to be sold, since few of the artists are willing to part with their creations. ■

