



FIRE IN THE FACE, 1992 OIL ON WOOD 12" x 11"

**MORGAN BULKELEY
RECENT WORK
NOVEMBER 5-30, 1993**

**OPENING RECEPTION
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5
5 P M T H R U 8 P M**

HOURS: TUES.-SAT., 10:00 AM TO 5:30 PM

HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

11 NEWBURY STREET BOSTON, MA 02116 617.262.0550

MORGAN BULKELEY RECENT WORK

Morgan Bulkeley's recent relief sculptures add to many of the images and themes which have run through his work for the past decade or more. His longstanding preoccupation with the nature/culture dualism and all its spin-off associations such as loss/gain, hope/despair, also unifies this new body of work. If anything, these narrative constructions have become more elaborate, now packed with greater ambiguity and irony.

For starters, these carved wood panels (all of which are miniature in size, a conscious reference to Persian manuscript illumination) are given to compact, frequently even dense, arrangements of quirky figures, most of which are involved in some kind of cryptic, war-like behavior or act of survival. While Bulkeley alternates his settings between either rural landscapes or desolate, urban lots, a certain jumble of incongruous, sometimes seemingly random objects appears in each work. In *Leap and Remedy* (1992), for example, three hulking boxes of band-aids sit in the foreground of a field awaiting the fall of an Icarus-like figure who has just sprung from a ladder into an ominous sky. Juxtaposed next to this eccentric air-born figure (outfitted with feathers for wings), is both a jet plunging to

calamity and a bird (in this case a near-extinct warbler) which floats with contrasting grace and ease. In Bulkeley's version of this morality tale, the central metaphor of folly and misguided ambition is layered with multiple meanings. On one level, the artist has recast the story of Icarus to incorporate a critique of technology, especially as it extends to issues of the collapse and disintegration of the natural world. On another level, the allegory takes on a private dimension in which aspects of the artist's own subjectivity are filtered through the languages of narration and visual description.

In fact, all of the work in this exhibition is conceived as a mask of the artist's persona. In *Leap and Remedy*, just as in *Two Faces* (1992) and *Axe Suspended* (1992), the slits of eyes and mouth-like forms are folded into an array of contradictions and disconnected imagery which congeal loosely into a facial substructure. Other works, such as *Fire in the Face* (1992), actually assume a recognizable mask-like form. From this safe distance, Bulkeley is able to both observe and unveil his emotional life, memory and feelings. His affinity with nature and the prospect of its doom has yielded an art which engages reverie and longing. It also engages with great wit the absurdity of the cultural idea of progress and the flip-side of scientific gain.

Debra Balken
September 1993