ignorant public. Here, bending to peer at Beuys's portrait, one sees only their own reflection, seeing Socrates's injunction: know
yourself. The exhibition opening tilted this poke at human vanity
by a fellow sitting in the back of the gallery mindlessly banging
away at a drum, his face covered
in a mask imprinted with Trump's
swearing features.
Beyond Dadaesque political pot
s, Unsealed and Delivered:
Portrait of a Collector also engaged
to the good-hearted laying bare of
glass gallery's duralm activities,
packing, unpacking, shipping,
installing shows, and taking them
all acknowledged —
the drudge side of a realm often
considered glamorous.
Elaborate collaboration of film
maker Bruce Checefsky and gallerist
Lesley Cochran, Unsealed offered
satire on several levels. One was
indictment of cultural prejudice,
another held vain folly, both artistic
and political, up for laughter, and
a third was just fun. One is reminded
of Mark Twain's astute observation:
"Everything human is pathetic. The
secret source of humor itself is not
joy but sorrow. There is no humor
in heaven."
—Dorothy M. Joiner

LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS
"Sculpting with Air"
deCordova Sculpture Park and
Museum
Ian McMahon and Jong Oh are both
interested in shaping the intangible,
though their work, and processes,
couldn't be more different. Brought
together for "Sculpting with Air"
(on view through September 30),
they also introduced a new experi
cence for deCordova visitors, who
were invited to watch the progress
of their site-specific installations.
McMahon, because of the size
and complexity of his works, has to
plan everything down to the last
detail. Engineering and computer
modeling are essential for him.
His process (much simplified) goes
something like this: first he blows
up big plastic forms, then he sprays
a plaster coating inside, lets it
harden, peels off the plastic, and
voilà — a rigid form that looks soft
and balloonish. Of course it's more
complicated than that — the inter
connected balloons are big enough
to walk into, and they have to be
airtight. Inside, the plastic is
supported by a wooden armature;
where the forms come together,
McMahon builds a wooden doorway
sealing the joints between units
with plywood lath. He inflates them
during the plaster-spraying phase
with powerful air compressors, and
he has to construct a double-doored
airlock to enter into his construction.
He builds the whole thing in his
studio first. Besides being a plasterer,
he is a carpenter, materials specialist,
metalworker, designer, mechanic,
and computer geek. A video shows
the spectacular destruction of earlier
McMahon works — columnar forms
smashed by one swing of a long pipe.
Tether will also be destroyed at the
end of its run, but viewers won't get
to see it happen.
In contrast to this massive work,
Oh produces delicate, challenging
lines in the air. Because his installa
tions depend on optical illusion,
he has to see and think about the
spaces they are to occupy before
he knows what he wants to do. Here,
he worked in two adjacent small
galleries. The first appears to be an
empty room. As eyes and brain
focus, forms, lines, and boxes begin
to emerge. One horizontal seems
to pierce the wall and continue into
the next room. For the verticals,
Oh uses extremely fine chain, some
times with a brass plumb bob
on the end so it will hang perfectly
straight. He makes the horizontals
with fine diameter rod; fishing line
contributes but remains invisible.
Each of Abakanowicz's sculptures dwells within this psychic landscape, a charged space that relinquishes boundaries between earth and epic human themes such as freedom and loss, victimization and survival, destruction and resurrection. The juggernaut of tensions drives works such as Marrow Bone (1987), from the "War Games" series. Abakanowicz began this series in response to the politically and financially motivated denuding of Poland's timberlands—once proud, muscular trees seized, stripped of their identities, and abandoned. She reclaimed cast-aside trunks deemed unworthy for lumber and gave them new life as riveting objects rife with metaphors of life and death. Marrow Bone (the title references the fatty and bloody life substance in human bone) consists of an amputated horizontal trunk fitted with iron casings at either end, knife-like metal projections protruding from their hollow cores, just as the work memorializes fallen natural lives, so does it sadly convey humanity's seamless and mindless drift from innocent victim to brute aggressor.

The elegant warp and raw welt of Abakanowicz's tapestries, made from hand-dyed unwound sisal rope, weave similarly unnerving metaphysical landscapes. Abakan Rouge III (1971, now in the collection of the MFA Houston), a jow-dropping example, is a massive and provocative vaginal form, its rich red surface the color of fresh blood. The central slit bisecting this lush, knotty fibrous landscape equates the womb with the comfort of a serape-like blanket. It takes a moment to experience this roughened stretch of fibrous cloth as a slashed organ, hemorrhaging down a stark, white wall.

"Coexistence" (2002), another series of fiber-based works, consists of a cast burlap phalanx of mythical animal-headed creatures with human torsos. Standing mute like sturdy oaks in a forest, these hollow figures conjure forest spirits morphed from