

Hannelore Baron

University Art Museum, California State University and Manny Silverman

Long Beach and West Hollywood

There's a tendency to view Hannelore Baron the artist as inseparable from Hannelore Baron the person. Scarred by her exposure to Nazism in her native Germany, Baron (1926–87) suffered several nervous breakdowns. She also struggled with cancer for the last two decades of her life. But Baron was nevertheless able to produce an original body of delicate mixed-media collages and wooden-box assemblages that conveyed a compelling fragility and pathos.

Organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), the show at the University Art Museum featured 40 of her collages and assemblages from 1969 to 1987, while Manny Silverman Gallery had about 30 of them from roughly the same period. Abstract, although frequently scored with symbolic markings such as stylized human figures, birds, and hieroglyphics, Baron's fabulously intricate pieces—often measuring less than half a square foot and incorporating paper, wire, wood, paint, and other materials—recall Kurt Schwitters's collages as well as the works of postwar painter-draftsmen such as Julius Bissier and Anton Heyboer. The feminist discourse



Hannelore Baron, *Untitled (C33 092)*, 1983, mixed-media collage, 8 1/2" x 9 1/2". Manny Silverman.

in American art of the 1970s seems to have had some influence on Baron's frequent incorporation of textile fragments and also on the obsessive wrapping and packing that characterize many of her later assemblages, most prominent in the Long Beach exhibition.

Although similar to one another in format, Baron's works offer quite different sensory experiences. Some of her marks look like violently rendered incisions, while others show the softness of a brush. And each work hints at a different vague narrative. One box contains a dirty piece of twine encapsulated under glass. Another is sealed like a small coffin. One collage looks like a page of a photo album that a child has scribbled on.

Neither of these exhibitions presented Baron's oeuvre in an especially focused or biographical manner, but by freeing us from the works' history, they also freed us from her own and allowed us to savor the shy power of her imagination.

—Peter Frank