

Eco-Art

ART

BY MARC AWODEY

Daniel Pittman is concerned about more than the formal aspects of art. In his show of new works at Burlington's Firehouse gallery, a connection between urban decay and the will of nature is exposed and addressed in wry and insidious ways.

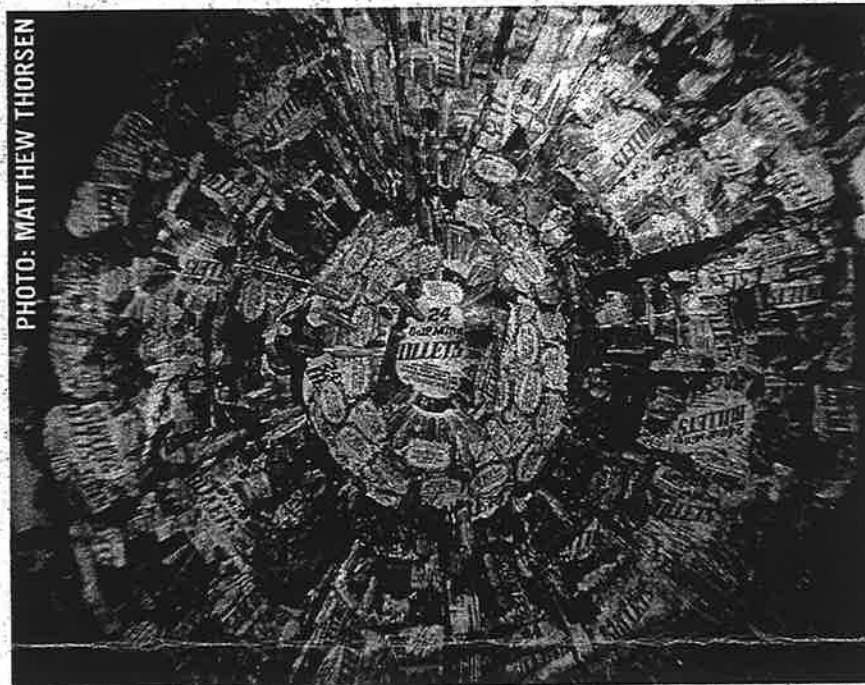
After all, there's something subversive about planting trees in the mouths of factory chimneys, or growing grass for a month in an art gallery and then abruptly paving over the carefully nurtured plot. Last week Pittman installed one of his

form is like a huge fan spanning a canyon, and a band of transparent crimson details the top edge of the canvas. "Marlboro" features a pilfered image of smoking cow-punchers riding along a horizon at sun-up — or sundown — through a cluttered atmosphere of similar advertising images. Reds and yellows punctuate the usual "greige," and a tar-like black smear hangs in the sky.

"Gold Mine Bullets" is titled after a brand name of the Popsicles. Pittman organized tattered, flattened and cut-up Popsicle boxes, painted with coffee and acrylic into a kind of solar

disk of radiating yellow, pale green, orange, purple and magenta Popsicle pictures. In "Gold Mine Bullets" and "Marlboro," Pittman's work becomes an earthy cousin to Pop Art, as he mines and undermines icons of modernity.

"Home on the Range," a literally earthy installation in the rear gallery, comments about society and environment in similarly muted tones. But there is an added element: smell. An elusive scent of soil permeates the air as a result of Pittman's



"Gold Mine Bullets," by Daniel Pittman

"Chimney Trees" at the old Hood plant on South Winooski Avenue in Burlington — viewable from the street. "Mother's New Dress" is the title of a grass-and-concrete piece that unfolded during last spring's "Process/Progress II" exhibit at the Firehouse.

Pittman has documented these organic acts within the present exhibit, while emphasizing more than process in his new works. He describes the decadence of post-industrial life with hues, textures and reorganized pictorial patterns that echo this degeneration. His colors are those of weathered packaging — like the litter of alley ways and vacant lots. His textures are those of peeling hand bills hastily glued onto brick walls.

Despite the importance of decomposition in Pittman's works, there is also a quest for order. "Road to Nowhere" and "You Reap What You Sow" are large-scale collages of aerial photos copied and reorganized into intricate motifs reminiscent of Persian rugs. "Road to Nowhere" is a tangled calligraphy of highway entrance ramps viewed from about 10,000 feet and bordered by serpentine suburban streets.

"You Reap What You Sow" has a similar border surrounding a jumbled matrix of plowed fields. Spilled coffee is a common medium in Pittman's work, imparting dried-out surfaces and weird sepia-colored stains that blend with the gray tones of his oversized Xeroxes.

This artist adds color sparingly. "God Damn" is a vertical piece also executed in acrylic and coffee on photocopied collage elements. Its central

piling of dried leaves in the south end of the room. Amidst the leaves is a makeshift wall for target shooting. Paper targets, torn sheets of the music for "Home on the Range" and outlined bison are glued to the weathered wall. There are green shotgun shell casings, and a few bits of junk metal scattered in the brown leaves.

On the opposite side of the gallery a ghostly classroom scene of four desks faces an altar-like wall where a 1919 high school diploma is hung, along with the photograph of a ruined school

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building with garbage piled in its yard. Again, Pittman punctuates his grays and beige with bits of aged color dancing within the degradation — green, purple and the red spots of the bull's-eyes offer some chromatic relief.

Pittman's language is essentially abstract, but he does not obfuscate his point of view. A careful balance of technical, aesthetic and social issues keeps his images legible. Like his pine tree planted in the Hood plant chimney, the rest of his new work is also eloquent. ⑦

Daniel Pittman, recent works. Firehouse Center for the Visual Arts, Burlington. Through January 14.