

In Brockton, embodiments of change

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BROCKTON — A palimpsest has been written on and written on again. Texts from the past float beneath those from the present, perhaps partially erased but still evident. “Palimpsest,” an exhibition at the Fuller Museum of Art, gives the world a different twist. Each of the artists grew up in another culture and settled in the United States. The text of their past bubbles up, flavoring and shaping the text of their present. All three works are temporary installations, doomed to their own erasure.

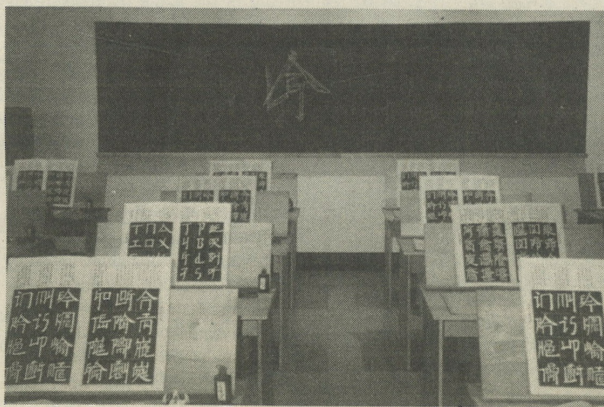
Ahmed Abdalla, an Egyptian, inscribes text in his native Arabic along with gestures and pictographs on the wall in his piece, “13, 2000.” The artist spent two weeks covering the wall with layers of pigment and language, creating an evanescent cloud that looks like a peach-infused sunset, mottled and vaporous with steely evening blue weighing down the corners. The text that appears in patches throughout reads like distant, chanting voices, caught in snatches on a breeze.

Pakistani Ambreen Butt also created a large-scale mural on one of the museum walls. “Art is an Instrument for Any Right” is built on patterns drawn from Butt’s training as a painter of Persian miniatures. In the center, an image of a woman holding a magnifying glass draws our eyes to the words “who’s right?” Other text snakes and stutters around the border: “Presence of the closed is a mirage of the viewer.” In short, we create our own roadblocks. Butt has built a mosaic design around the central image from tiny bits of text, echoing the words of the title. Past and present collide in this palimpsest’s images, message, and style, and the artist works to reconcile the two.

Xu Bing’s “New English Calligraphy” invites the viewer to sit down in a classroom before a blackboard and learn calligraphy — not Chinese calligraphy, but a calligraphy that echoes English words, inked in the graphic style of Chinese writing. An instructional video plays; brushes, ink bottles, and practice books sit on each desk. Here, the palimpsest is a metaphorical one: the mind of the student, already imprinted with English, trying to learn a new language and a new culture.

A palimpsest is a good metaphor for anyone’s consciousness, constantly being smudged, reshaped, and rewritten. It’s a particularly bittersweet representation of the life of immigrants like these artists, who experience such dissonance between what they are writing now and what lies beneath.

The Fuller also offers its annual environmental art show, staged by Environmental Arts Inc., in the woods behind the museum. “Walk-



Xu Bing’s installation invites one to try a new way of writing.

PALIMPEST

Ahmed Abdalla, Ambreen Butt, Xu Bing
Through Sunday

WALKING THROUGH

Installation by Environmental Arts Inc.
Through Oct. 15
Both at: Fuller Museum of Art, Brockton

ing Through,” curated by Carol Seitchik and offering the works of 10 artists, is an arty playland. Walk down Caroline’s Path (named for the Fuller’s late director, Caroline Graboys) and you’ll find a handful of treasures, works that feel as if the fairies have been up all night spinning magic in the trees.

Seitchik has designed the show to create a sense of wonder and expectation in the viewer. Jim Coates’s “Educated Forest Floor — A Transition” is a series of steppingstones that lead you into the forest. He tops each concrete block with bronze casts of acorns, leaves, and twigs plucked from the woods. Follow the stones to the forest’s threshold: Kate Dodd’s “Membranes/Placeholders,” a 20-foot-high curtain of photographs of the very place where they hang.

Step inside, and the magic begins. Rebecca Doughty has found branches, graceful but dead, and painted them soft, vibrant colors so that they can be spotted like flags or slender ghosts, throughout the forest. Ted Hirsch, the fairies’ carpenter, has set “14 Songs on a Walk” along the path: twigs and branches snuggled together into small shelters. He encourages visitors to build their own.

Joan Mullen examines personal perspective in “What You See,” a series of green mesh funnels mounted on trees along the path. Inside each funnel hangs either an image or a reflective panel. The photo-transfer images, transparencies of old snapshots, force us to view the forest through the shape

of a woman or a man, or a mother and child. Grace Pond Cain examines the line from tree to paper to writing in “Speaking Through”; she mounts dozens of scribbled-on sticky notes on chicken-wire fences surrounding tree trunks.

Frank Vasello’s “Spiral Vortex” wins the award for obsessive but masterful construction. He has assembled hundreds of branches into a 15-foot vortex framed by stones in the landscape, a frightening, voracious shape fashioned from humble materials. Bill Botzow’s huge and curvaceous “Spine,” built from locust branches, snakes up a hill and over a rock, flicking at its end like a dragon’s tail.

Christopher Frost brings research to bear on his piece, a concrete pedestal reading “Park” and supporting a small plant in a bronze pot. It pays homage to D. W. Field, who at the beginning of the last century donated this land to the city of Brockton. Field wanted people to enjoy the natural flow of the woods, untouched by landscaping; his notion of a park contradicted that of many of his contemporaries.

Wesley Reddick’s “Swing Beams” doesn’t stand in the woods, but is supported by the museum’s wall. Reddick has created two giant swings from wooden beams: One can swing in circles, the other moves from left to right. He encourages visitors to climb up and take a swing. It’s delightful, and consistent with the rest of the work in the show, which feels more accessible and more fun than anything you can find inside a museum’s walls.

REGATTABAR
at The Charles Hotel • Harvard Sq. Cambridge • (617) 661-5000
SOME OF THE BEST JAZZ IN AMERICA
28 Jul Fri 8 & 10pm: \$14; 29 Jul Sat 8 & 10pm: \$16
THE MARCUS ROBERTS TRIO WITH ROLAND GUERIN AND JASON MARSALIS
1 Aug Tue 8:30pm: \$8

For home delivery.
1-888 MY GLOBE | 1-888-694-5623
The Boston Globe