



S I G N S

O F L I F E

REBECCA HOWLAND

CHRISTY RUPP

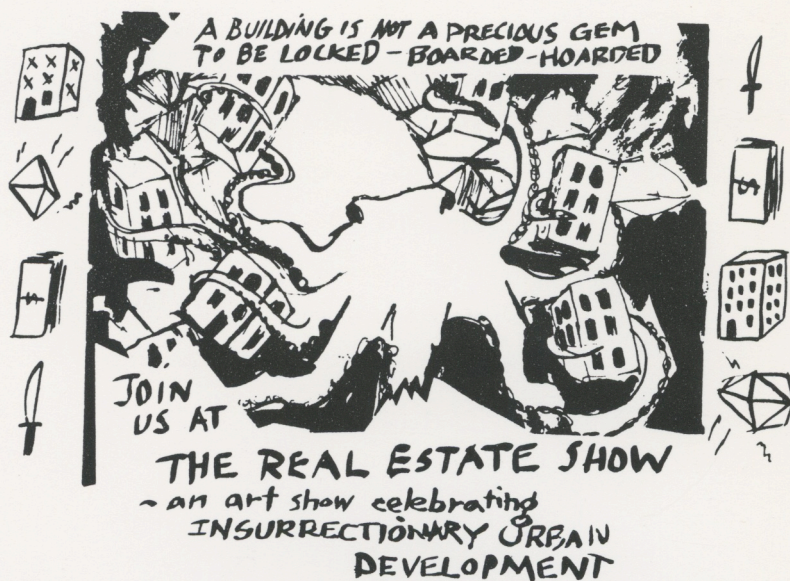
KIKI SMITH

CARA PERLMAN

SIGNS
OF LIFE

The exponential rate of technological advancement in the 20th century is a dizzying and euphoric phenomenon that pervades every aspect of modern life. As never before in human history, boundaries between what we consider real and artificial, living and dead, inner and outer, are blurred far beyond the limited tracking range of our cognitive and sensory capabilities. By now, however, ongoing atrocities committed against nature in all forms have made us well aware of the nightmarish consequences of a rapid ascension to Virtual Paradise unaccompanied by any tangible sense of social harmony or spiritual evolvment. The utopian heralding of the machine as God in the teens and 1920s was soon followed by prophetic warning signs such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, published only a year before the Nazis began their systematic extermination of millions, and six years before our own state-of-the-art annihilation of Hiroshima. Nuclear paranoia (remember air-aid drills and basement fallout shelters in the 1960s?) has now been displaced by the far more immediate dangers of global warming, air and water pollution, AIDS, and the destruction of the rainforests.

Rebecca Howland, Cara Perlman, Christy Rupp and Kiki Smith are among the scores of contemporary artists creating work that deals with the unsettling interface of nature and technology. What distinguishes their artmaking from that of many of their peers is their rejection of a high-tech, polished factory look preoccupied with formalism and art-about-art, in favor of a homemade, roughly hewn, humanist approach. The four artists began to exhibit in the late 1970s as members of Collaborative Projects (Colab), a New York group that collectively organized film and video projects, an art/film journal, and theme exhibitions. The forty or so original Colab members had come of age during a decade dominated by arcane minimalist theory and a sequestered gallery system that rarely addressed gripping social realities like homelessness,



Poster design by Rebecca Howland for *The Real Estate Show*.

above right: Cardboard Air Band at No Rio. K. Smith, vocals; C. Rupp, horn.

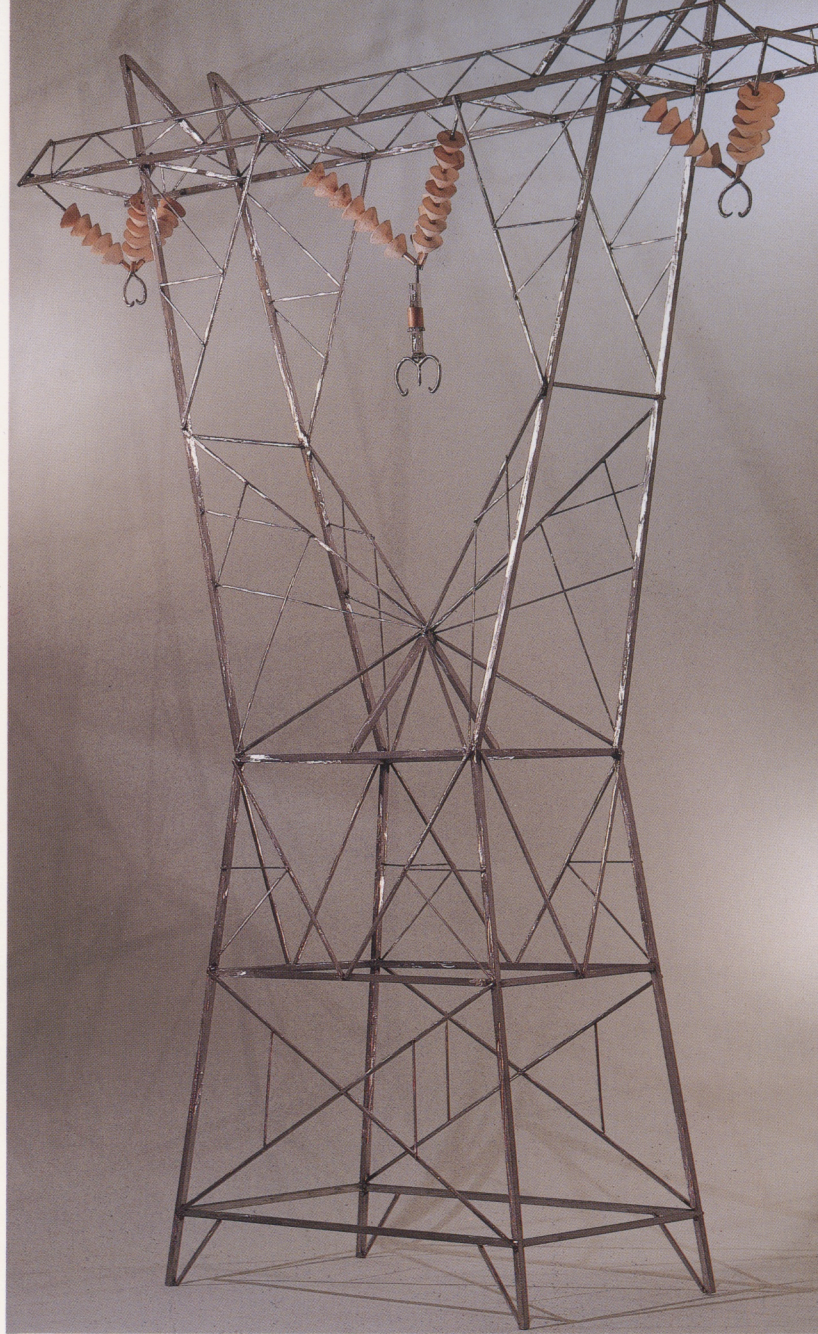
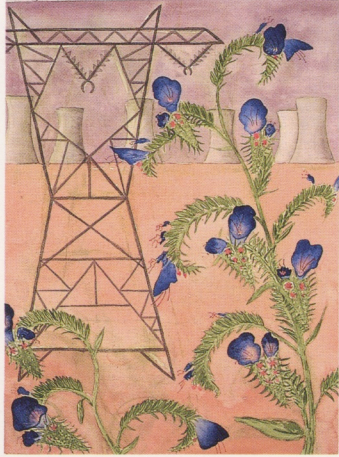
hunger, and scores of undeclared wars. Like the New Wave musicians who had gotten around the locked doors of a nearsighted music business by producing their own gypsy-label records, Colab artists opened stores to sell low-cost multiples, aired films and videos on the newly available cable TV network, published their own magazine, and staged an impressive and influential series of "post-gallery" exhibitions including *The Times Square Show*, installed in a former bus terminal/massage parlor;

The Real Estate Show, co-organized by Howland at a storefront on the Lower East Side; and *Animals Living in Cities*, organized by Rupp at Fashion/Moda in the South Bronx.



REBECCA HOWLAND

The towers are part of my childhood memories—omnipotent and ubiquitous public sculptures that have become invisible . . . Before I made the sculptures, I went out to sketch different towers in the field, as in the old days when an artist would go out to draw a tree. I felt they were sculptures of the American landscape.¹ Although Rebecca Howland's work has addressed technocratic power structures since 1980, the artist achieved one of her most resonant metaphors in a series of steel sculptures fabricated over a period of five months at Sculpture Space in Utica, New York and subsequently exhibited in the auditorium of P.S. 1, Long Island City, in 1986. Ranging in height from five to over eleven feet, the welded steel and terra-cotta **Transmission Towers** are at once majestic and frightening, and a veritable wellspring of art historical and vernacular associations. Commanding in their sheer mimetic matter-of-factness, the towers also manage to conjure up visions of Gothic cathedrals, classical torsos, Constructivist sculpture, and sci-fi monster machines with tentacles about to prey on unsuspecting victims. Actually, the reference to "preying" is not merely poetic interpretation by a hyper-imaginative viewer; the artist fully intended the sculptures to allude to state power companies' insidious abuse of the rural landscape. It is now believed that living in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines causes a higher incidence of cancer and induces still-born calves in cattle. **I wanted to make it more than the eye could see, more than the mind could hold at a glance; an implosion, an epileptic metropolis.**² *Brainwash*, 1983.



Dimensions for all works
illustrated are in inches; height
precedes width precedes depth.

Transmission Line Tower #6
welded steel and terra cotta
84 x 40 x 26 (detail, opposite)
1985-1986

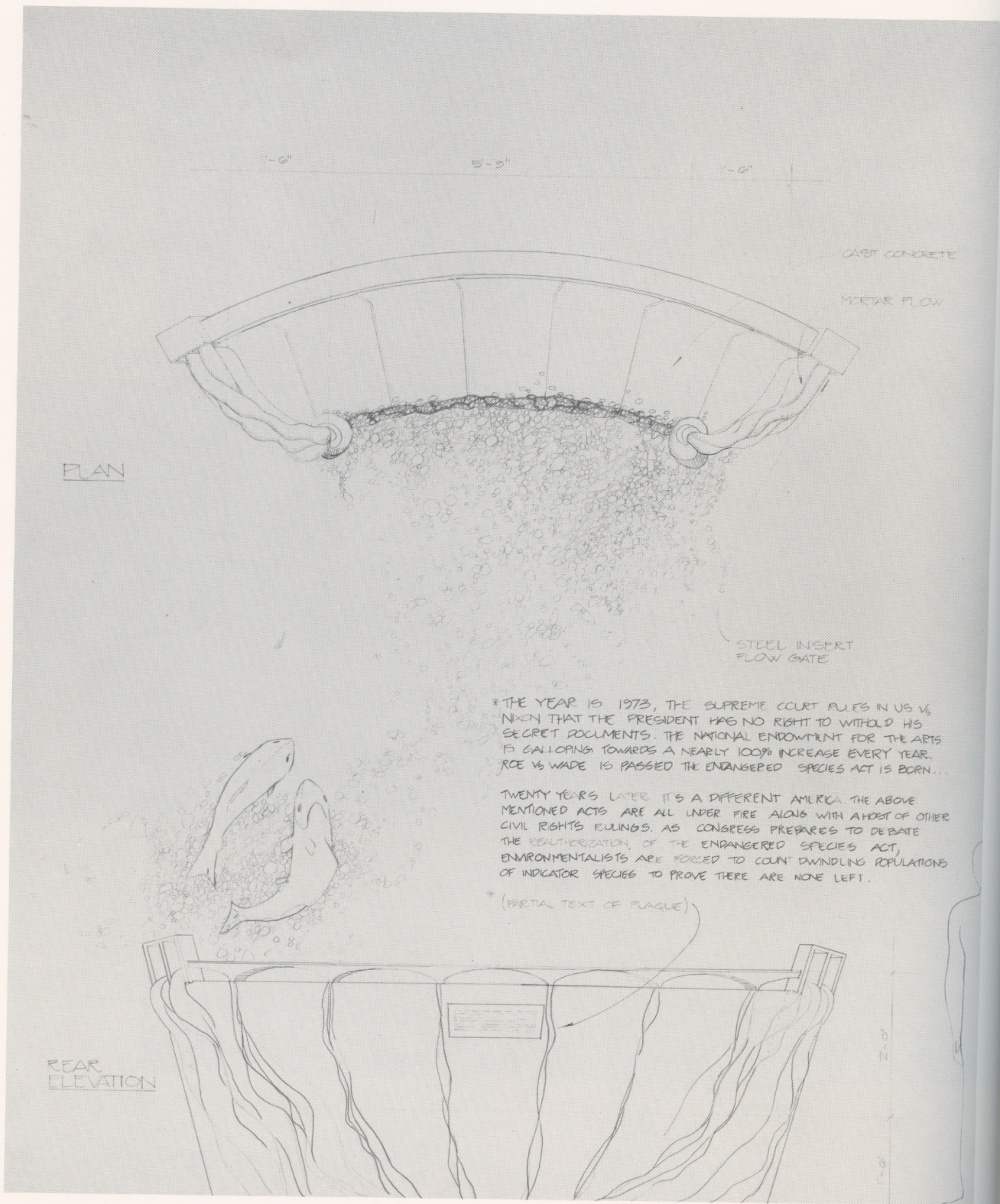
**Weeds: Viper's Bugloss and
Nuclear Generating Plant**
watercolor on paper
30 x 22
1988

Transmission Line Tower #1
welded steel and terra cotta
132 x 102 x 30 (above)
1985-1986



Admit Being Animal
tempera and oil on hinged panel
17 x 14 closed; 17 x 28 open
1991
collection of
Susan and Michael Hort

Brainwash
mixed media installation
at ABC No Rio, New York
1983



Roll Back Bench

(project commissioned by Washington State Arts Commission Percentage for

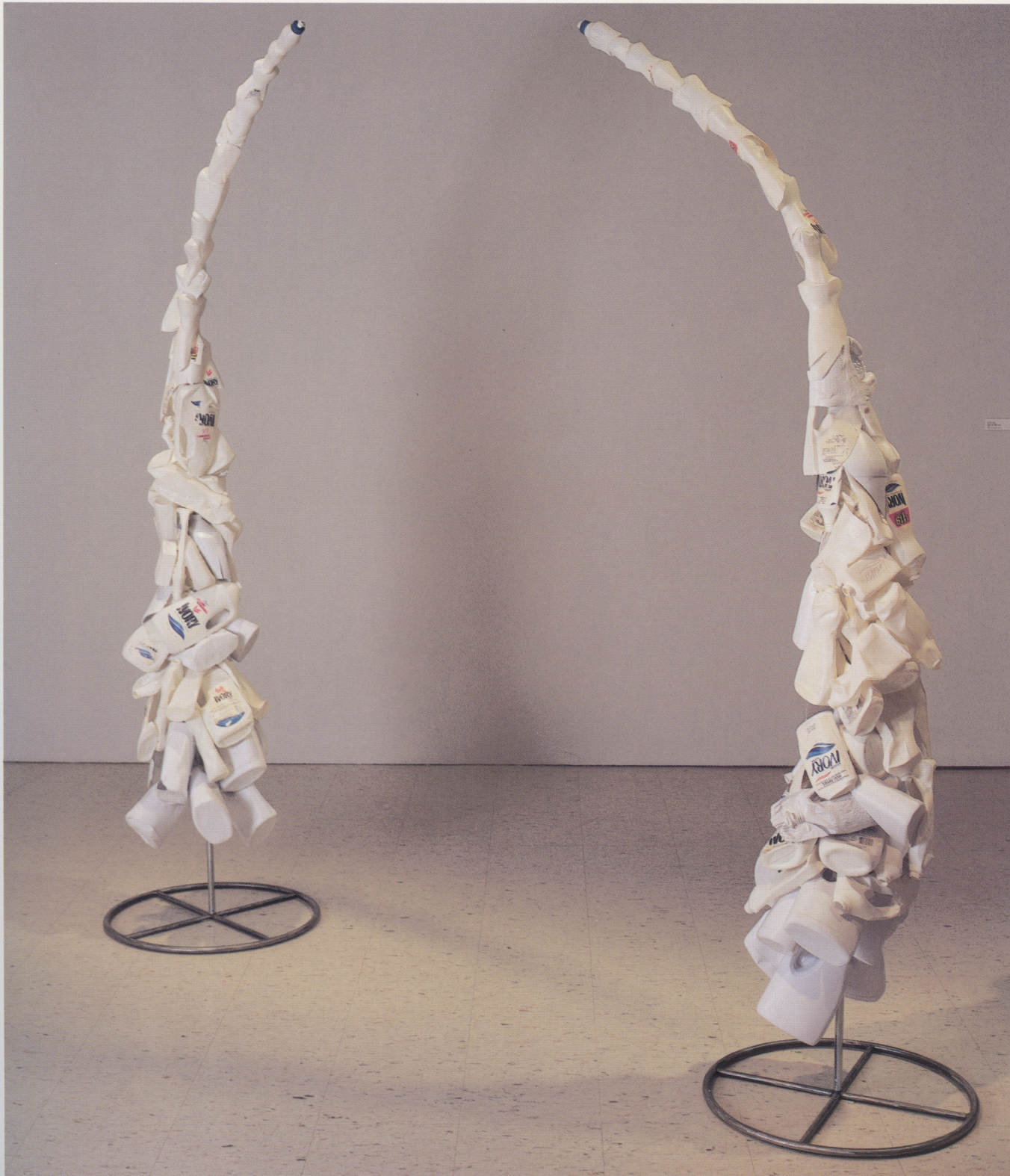
Art Program and installed at University of Washington, Seattle in 1992)

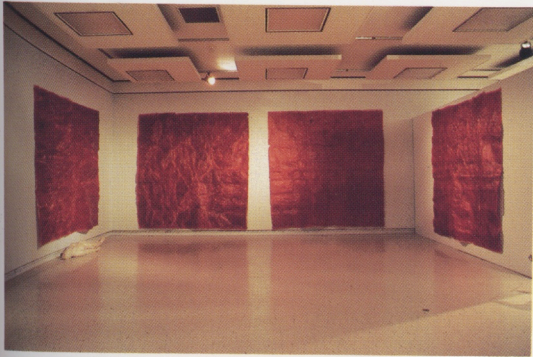
99.4% Forgotten

welded steel, plastic bottles

95 x 38 x 14

1990





Untitled
ink, glue, Nepal and
Gampi paper
paintings: approx.
120 x 120, each of 4
figure: life size
1989

Untitled
ink on paper
72 x 36
1989





In the Woods
installation view
cement, steel, latex,
chicken wire, ink,
metal leaf, plaster
1992

Untitled
chicken wire, latex, ink
46 x 28 x 7
1991





WORKS IN THE
EXHIBITION

All works are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.
Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

REBECCA HOWLAND

Strata: Fossil Fuel Fossils

cast synthetic stone, pigments,
concrete base

96 x 48 x 3

1983

collection of Kiki Smith

Transmission Line Tower #1

welded steel, terra cotta

132 x 102 x 30

1985-1986

Transmission Line Tower #5

welded steel, terra cotta

90 x 36 x 28

1985-1986

Transmission Line Tower #6

welded steel, terra cotta

84 x 40 x 26

1985-1986

Transmission Line Tower #7

welded steel, terra cotta

72 x 42 x 24

1985-1986

Black Flower

forged steel

12 x 12 x 15

1986

**Weeds: Viper's Bugloss and
Nuclear Generating Plant**

watercolor on paper

30 x 22

1988

Female Juices

watercolor on paper

30 x 22

1989

Kotex and Pomegranate

watercolor on paper

30 x 22

1990

All Child

oil and tempera on gesso panel

21 x 29

1990

Coffin Print

collaged lithograph

72 x 36

1990

CHRISTY RUPP

Deconstructadon

cardboard with steel frame,
metal clips, wire

approx. 120 x 216 x 120

1988

collection of Lakeview Museum of Arts
and Sciences, Peoria, IL

99.4% Forgotten

welded steel, plastic bottles

95 x 38 x 14

1990

Species Born-a-gradable

welded steel, visiglass,

polyethylene

34 x 57 x 56

1990

Hydromaze

welded steel, plastic, ping-pong balls

approx. 45 x 153 x 105

1990

Red Tide

welded steel and plastic

60 x 36 x 21, each of 2

1991

CARA PERLMAN

In the Woods

mixed media installation

a. 8 trees: cement, steel
approx. overall dimensions:

125 x 120 x 120

b. eagles:

Untitled

chicken wire, plaster, metal leaf

44 x 21 x 10

1991

Untitled

chicken wire, plaster, metal leaf

48 x 17 x 10

1991

Untitled

chicken wire, plaster, metal leaf

31 x 33 x 7

1991

Untitled

chicken wire, latex, ink

46 x 28 x 7

1991

Untitled

chicken wire, latex, ink

43 x 20 x 7

1991

KIKI SMITH

Nervous Giant

embroidery thread on muslin

147 x 42

1986

courtesy of the artist and Fawbush
Gallery, New York

Nervous Giant

embroidery thread on muslin

126 x 43

1986

courtesy of the artist and Fawbush
Gallery, New York

Nervous Giant

embroidery thread on muslin

161 x 50

1986

courtesy of the artist and Fawbush
Gallery, New York

Untitled

ink, glue, Nepal and Gampi paper

paintings: approx. 120 x 120,
each of 4

figure: life size

1989

Blood Noise

dye on cloth, mirrors, paper

156 x 60 x 72

1991

**CREDITS AND
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COVER Detail of **Untitled**, 1989 with superimposed graphic of **Nervous Giant**, 1986; both artworks by Kiki Smith. Cover design by Peter Bushell and Debra Risberg.

PHOTOS (by page number)

Debra Risberg: 24, 30a, 31, 33, 34, 35, 42, 48, 56-59, 64 and graphic translations: cover, 10, 24, 36, 50. Peter Bellamy: 17b, 19, 21a, 22, 23. Michael Sarver: 16, 20, 32, 43a, 70, 71. D. James Dee: 38, 43b, 47. Tom Warren: 17a, 52-55. Lisa Kahane: 4, 5. Bill Lewis: 60, 61. Rebecca Howland: 18. Teri Slotkin: 62 Mitch Corber: 21b.

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