

Robert Dancik's mixed-media sculpture, "2,186,496,000, Heart Monitor, 1919-1972," chronicles the number of heartbeats his father experienced during his life.

# Time, place and space collide in Wustum summer exhibit

By JAMES AUER  
Journal Sentinel art critic

Racine — Thomas Wolfe summed it up well when he titled one of his more exhilarating novels, "Of Time and the River."

Time, with its continuous, flowing movement, is a river. Put the two together, and they symbolize the constant flux that is the stuff of life.

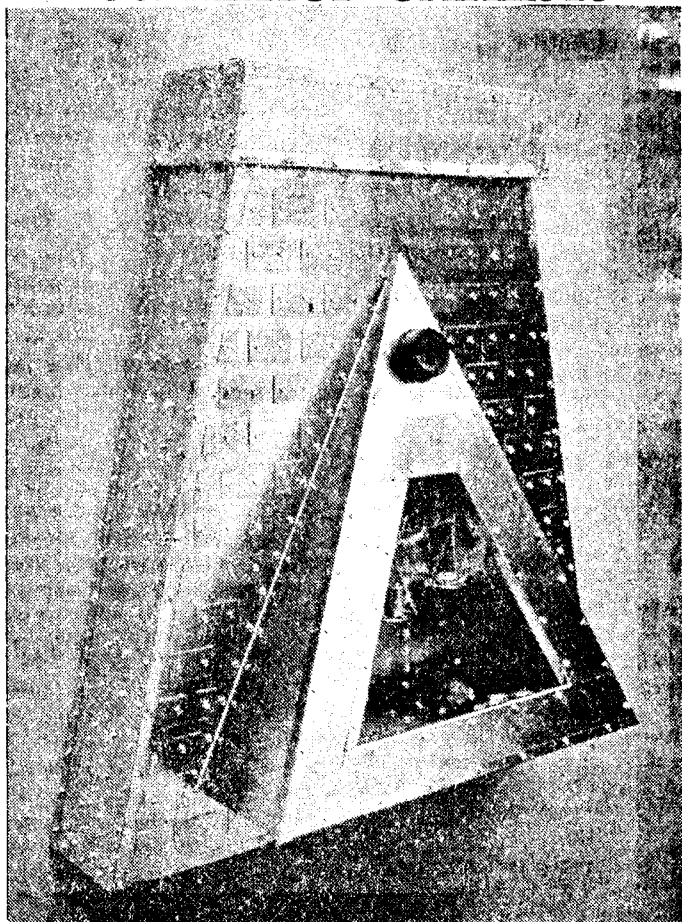
It is also the stuff of art. And art, since it arises out of the specifics of time and place, is at once a substitute for, and the equivalent of, life itself.

Need proof? Drop in at the Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, 2519 Northwestern Ave., where director Bruce Pepich and curator Caren Heft have mounted their annual summer exhibit.

This year's warm-weather extravaganza, viewable through Aug. 27, is based on the wordy if promising theme, "Who Knows Where or When: Artists Interpret Time and Place."

Don't let the title fool you. The show, winnowed down to 125 works from a roster of more than 300 potential invitees, is far more than an assortment of clocks, watches and maps.

To be sure, there are cleverly crafted clock faces, numbers and hands, along with landscapes of almost every sort: vaporous, solid, liquid. But the included artists have gone well beyond the basics of timekeeping.



Michael Aurbach has used the pyramid imagery of ancient Egypt and a cyclops-like camera lens to create an eerie still life.

Some, like Michael Aurbach, have incorporated the imagery of ancient Egypt — in this instance, a sheet-metal pyramid — into a still life that has modern-day impact and sly irony.

Set into a niche in Aurbach's pyramid is a scale of the sort used by Egyptian priests to weigh souls at the time of death. A snake and a cyclops-like camera lens link parallel worlds of past, present and future.

The result is at once eerie and moving — a centuries-spanning meditation on tradition, religion and outright superstition.

Equally innovative is "The Waters of the World," a vivid, compelling mixed-media piece in which Joan Backes flanks a painting of a wave-flecked sea with two bowls of water, one taken from Lake Michigan the other from the Atlantic.

How is the passage of time documented in this peculiar work? Why, by evaporation, of course. The cloud-shrouded ocean in the central picture is tantalizingly anonymous. Water levels fluctuate constantly in the adjacent glass containers.

The concept of time, deterioration and dissolution is taken to harrowing lengths in Vincent Borrelli's untitled sequence of enlarged video frames, tracing the death of his father.

The elder Borrelli descends, tragically, from a curious, committed, vigorous man to an unconscious body swathed in tubes and wires to a senseless corpse, mouth agape, on a table.

Equally tough on a personal level is Robert Dancik's small but complex mixed-media sculpture, "2,186,496,000, Heart Monitor, 1919-1972." It chronicles the number of heartbeats his father experienced during his relatively brief lifetime.

Fortunately, not everything in the exhibit is ponderous or depressing. Gayle Marie Weitz's

## If you go

**What:** "Who Knows Where Or When: Artists Interpret Time and Place"

**When:** through Aug. 27

**Where:** Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, 2519 Northwestern Ave., Racine

**How much:** Free. For information, call (262) 636-9177.

amusing "Glove Compartment," for example, is literally a highway map tucked into a compartment in a hollow wooden glove.

In fact, much of the work is actually quite funny. Max King Kap, a newcomer to the Wustum's roster of exhibitors, fills a frame with tiny marks representing "all the cars in which I said, 'I love you.'" The number is too big to count.

JoAnna Poehlmann, a gifted punsmith, illustrates the coyly poetic title, "Moonrise Over Plymouth Rock," by combining a stuffed chicken (the aforementioned Plymouth Rock) with an assortment of luna moths in nocturnal flight.

Philip Krejcarek comments on terror, loss and sheer, blatant exhibitionism in a lively update of Edvard Munch's "The Scream."

David V. Holmes embeds a working clock in the back of an enormous fly in the appropriately labeled "Tempus Fugit."

Ricky Bernstein explores the disputed territory between leisure and lying in a goofy, three-dimensional wall piece he has labeled, simply, "Excuses."

In terms of sheer, lyrical craftsmanship, it would be hard to beat Tom Rauschke and Kaaren Wiken's "Table Lands." This is, in effect, a table-top still

life depicting a rolling, sculpturally eroded landscape. Immaculately carved and burnished, it is one of the show's high points.

Equally well executed is a diptych in which J. Shimon and J. Lindemann combine and contrast two black-and-white photographs: one of a Jackson Pollock painting on a TV set in a minimalist motel room, the other of artist Paul Hefty and his bottle sculptures in La Crosse.

Also, for sheer, slapdash fun, it would be hard to beat Dana A. Tindall's delightful — and lethally accurate — three-dimensional construction, "Border Squabbles." This motorized work, complete with childish soundtrack, is as good an indictment of the senselessness of war as you're likely to find these days.

Seemingly tossed together, but with its sights plainly set on the diplomats and dictators of a totally irrational world, it sends its rockets flying and its armies marching while "leaders" squabble like kids on a grade-school playground. It's a riot.

The imagination and energy that invigorate this summer's invitational show are a *crédit* to Pepich and Heft, who have had to keep the exhibits coming in the face of major changes at the museum, which will be opening an ambitious new downtown facility in summer 2002.

The museum's present home, formerly the residence of Jennie Wustum, who gave it to the city in 1941, will remain in use, primarily as a showcase for local and regional art and as a center for educational programs.

The Wustum's extensive collection of craft objects — many donated to the museum by philanthropist Karen Johnson Boyd — will be kept in the new facility, which is being created out of two existing structures at a cost of about \$5 million.