

Alfred Bader

Art Related

Correspondence

Nancy Morgan Harris

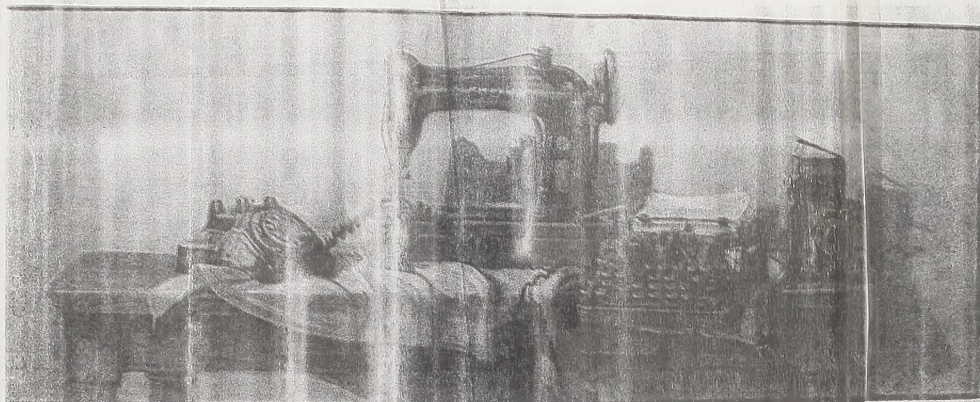
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# Still lifes reveal keen eye

## Painter, sculptor show at Patrick King

icy Morgan-Barnes is an old-fashioned painter's liver. This Birmingham, Ala., artist is very good at the small-scale stuff of still life, and she is a student of a centuries-old tradition of painterly realism. She ably assembles a

ramic vase, an ink bottle — and translating it all into a casual but accurate painted image. Her 18 still lifes on view at Patrick King Contemporary Art show her to be an apt student of a centuries-old tradition of painterly realism. She ably assembles a

practically abstract mash of dots and dashes, adjectives and lines that almost innocently conceal, cohere then evoke themselves convincingly from a few inches distance as uncluttered, whimsical, pencil-sketches. A tiny bust of Beethoven, what have you.

In the process of artfully rendering all of this cultural trivia and pocket baggage, she creates a domestic stage of which, albeit cluttered, is still rather charming.

The eye wanders from detail to incident to detail, dot-dash-dot, forever entertained. The mind

### ON EXHIBIT

Paintings by Nancy Morgan-Barnes and sculptures by John Misher. Artists — Nancy Morgan-Barnes, John Misher. Location — Patrick King Contemporary Art, 427 Mass. Avenue. When — Through June 30.

time to absorb sufficient cultural validity.

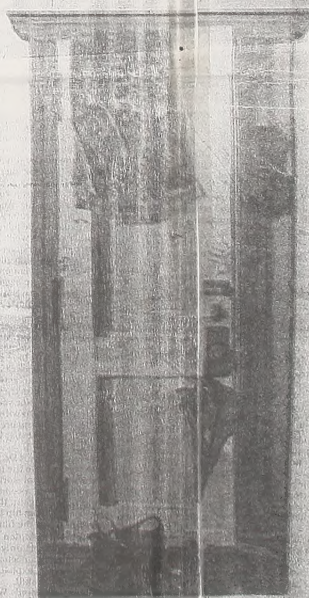
She mixes it all up with occasional cleverness, perhaps even metaphorical intent. A reproduction (a snapshot?) of a Bronzino painting leans next to an old island camera. A model of the armless Venus stands behind the mechanical hands of Singer. These juxtapositions remain merely hints (metaphoric depth, Morgan-Barnes supplies) of the occasional skull, surefire evidence of contemplations with the infinite.

A skull keynotes Morgan-Barnes' most moving work, *Departed Figure*, a picture of a chair (empty save for skull) and a disquieting shadow left like the impression of a body, pictorially and literally, a dead spot in the painting.

The more one studies these paintings, the more interesting these shadows become, more for what they don't say than what they do. *Dear Center in Reader's Basement*, the artist paints an open book, blank except for the shadow of the female reader's profile. In *Advice of an Era*, the shadow of the camera on the edge of the table begins to suggest, as if a ghost, somewhat bizarrely, a bird's head figure.

Such shadow hints are, admittedly, a little to go on, but they insinuate something of a self-portrait. The artist sees herself in the old-fashioned role as observer and diarist — not as avant-garde theorist, not as expressionist screaming out of the spotlight, tucked away into a corner, behind a door, very much like the discarded doll in *Crystal Heart*.

As solid as traditional as this position is, it is departed, tinged with melancholy. This is reinforced by the old-fashioned



Other works: *History Door* (above) and *Altarpiece of an Era* (top photo).

and frequently she can vary them in paint, the more she might prevent the slow evaporation of their original freshness and emotional power.

John Misher's sculptures are colorful concoctions of mostly flat, abstract shapes of angles and curves, in every instance but

the piece in motion for a few seconds.

Taken as static forms, Misher's sculpture is unexceptionally crafty while kinetic pieces, the five works offer small moments of suspense as moving elegantly swing by, narrowly missing stationary parts. All go

F. K. N. T. much



STEVE MANNHEIMER

waits patiently for this reborn of props to sort itself out and supply the drama, the message, the meaning.

There certainly should be one. A few hundred years ago, still life painting was born in a sea of allegory. The bug on the bloom was death devouring beauty. The best 20th-century practitioners of the genre, Giorgio Morandi, William Bailey and such, have, like their century, left off the specific religious or meta-physical symbolism but retained that rock-solid air of impending meaning, of great thoughts compressed into humdrum.

Morgan-Barnes hints that the big thoughts are there. A bust of Dante leads the way in several paintings. The artist variously alludes to Renaissance artists, the Venus de Milo, the trompe l'oeil tradition of 19th-century American painters Peale and Pele, Indian and bear-skin rugs. The viewer is assured that the artist has an eclectic grasp of the riches of history.

Morgan-Barnes is equally at home conjuring the less exotic world of grandmotherly Singer, sewing machines, manual typewriters and clunky, black, rota-





She is very, very good at the small-scale stuff of the buttons and scissors and of a spilled sewing-machine receiver, a ce-

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Barnes and Sculpture by John Mishler  
Mishler — Nancy Morgan-Barnes, John  
Mishler  
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Art, 427 Massachusetts Avenue  
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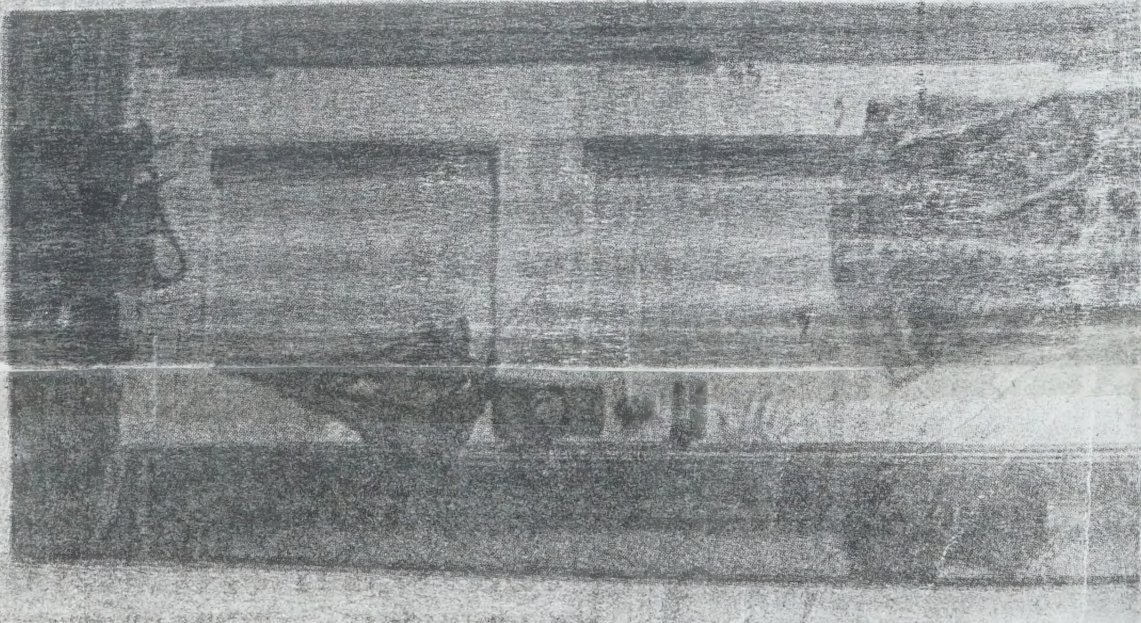
If these juxtapositions remain merely hints of metaphorical depth, Morgan-Barnes supplies the occasional skull, surefire evidence of confrontations with the infinite.

A skull keynotes Morgan-Barnes' most evocative work, *Departed Figure*, a picture of a chair (empty, save that skull) and a disquieting shadow left like the impression of a body, pictorially and literally, a dead spot in the painting.

The more one studies these paintings, the more interesting these shadows become, more for what they do not say than what they do. Dead center in *Reader in the Basement*, the artist paints an open book, blank except for the shadow of the female reader's profile. In *All's a Piece of an Era*, the shadow of the camera on the edge of the table begins to suggest, somewhat bizarrely, a skirted figure.

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# Exhibit shows inner richness

## Doorways, Windows and Other Secrets

**Artist:** Nancy Morgan-Barnes.  
**Location:** Ruschman Art Gallery, 948 N. Alabama St.  
**Phone:** (317) 634-3114.  
**When:** Through April 12.



## Visual Arts

**Steve Mannheimer**

Upon first take, the art of Nancy Morgan-Barnes appears to be an umpteen-course, all-you-can-see allegorical banquet of signs and symbols, motions, notions and emotions, grand drama and anecdote, illusions, allusions and a toilet — although not the kitchen sink.

Yet, for all their abundance, these 19 paintings on view at the Ruschman Art Gallery depict a relatively modest-to-medium-sized domestic world, a realm defined by walls, floors, closets and chairs, sewing kits and bare light bulbs.

Far from a contradiction in terms, this vision of the encyclopedic interior is the source of this art's immediate appeal. It confirms what we all know:

That our inner experience, our own ongoing inner saga, is far richer and more-varied than the nominal roles which others may ascribe to us and by which we may even describe ourselves in the shallow flow of daily life.

Instead, the artist suggests, her interior existence is overstuffed with incident and memory, with anger, humor, melancholy and mystery, with glimmers of beauty and shadows of regret.

## 17th-century precedents

Art history provides some obvi-

ous antecedents for Morgan-Barnes, in particular the great northern European still lifes of the 17th century. Those, too, offered up what were literally feasts for the eyes, so frequently images of food that overflowed the table in search of a diner.

More recent parallels may be found closer to home. Morgan-Barnes' work must be seen in the context of other past or current Bloomington artists like James McGarrell and even Morgan-Barnes' husband, Robert Barnes.

In that, no one really deserves credit of invention or influence. Their common central metaphor — that inner panorama, that overstuffed life — is by now public domain.

Rather, let us credit Morgan-Barnes with the wit and wiles to orchestrate it all so convincingly. Even her most complex compositions — for instance, *Wedding Party Disaster* and *The Departure* — are locked together with a sure sense of overall pictorial structure.

The details can be equally successful. Scattered throughout these paintings are occasional bursts of virtuoso brushwork — a glass on the floor in *Dragon Kimono*, a face almost submerged in shadow in *Slide Show* or the entire top half of *Voyeur*, in which the glass of a window provides a private view into someone else's window across the alley as well as the reflection of the viewer/artist's vantage.

## Complexity its own reward

It is perhaps enough to acknowledge and admire the complexity of Morgan-Barnes' art. Any definitive deciphering may be impossible. Further, it may really be nobody's business.

Despite the allure of this color-drenched smorgasbord of imagery, the viewer can't quite escape the impression that it's all a personal

circus performed by the artist and her intimates.

Obviously there are some purposes crossing here.

If this is a diary of Morgan-Barnes' inner life, she has taken great pains to leave it open on the living room sofa. In this, she is no different than so many artists whose lives are the most reliable wellspring of their art.

But unlike so many of them, Morgan-Barnes has made little if any effort to disguise her characters as anonymous Everybodies. Her husband, the occasionally self-rhapsodized and generally charming artist, is portrayed with a certain austere authority in *Portrait of Bob* and even with a touch of menace in *Bob Ascending the Staircase*.

The artist spares no jabs on herself, either, *Self-Portrait in Prom Dress*, an image of the decidedly middle-aged artist in her high-school formal, is wryly, almost wickedly self-deprecating — and as such so very honestly human.

For my tastes, it is this quality of self-confession that gives Morgan-Barnes' work its greatest power.

True, her flying circus *qua* movable feast provides passages of theatrical delight. But the more profound, more disquieting meaning of Morgan-Barnes' art may be seen best in tight focus, in works such as *Slide Show* or *Iron Self-Portrait*.

In both, the artist confronts her ultimate audience: herself. At that point in the show, she has no further need of aesthetic acrobatics and constant visual distraction. She realizes it takes more courage to just stop and stare at the image in the mirror.

Steve Mannheimer is an associate professor of painting at the Herron School of Art, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.









File:  
Nancy  
Powers



# Nancy Morgan-Barnes

## "Doorways, Windows & Other Secrets"

March 14 - April 12 1997

Artist Reception: Friday, March 14th  
5:00 - 9:00 p.m.



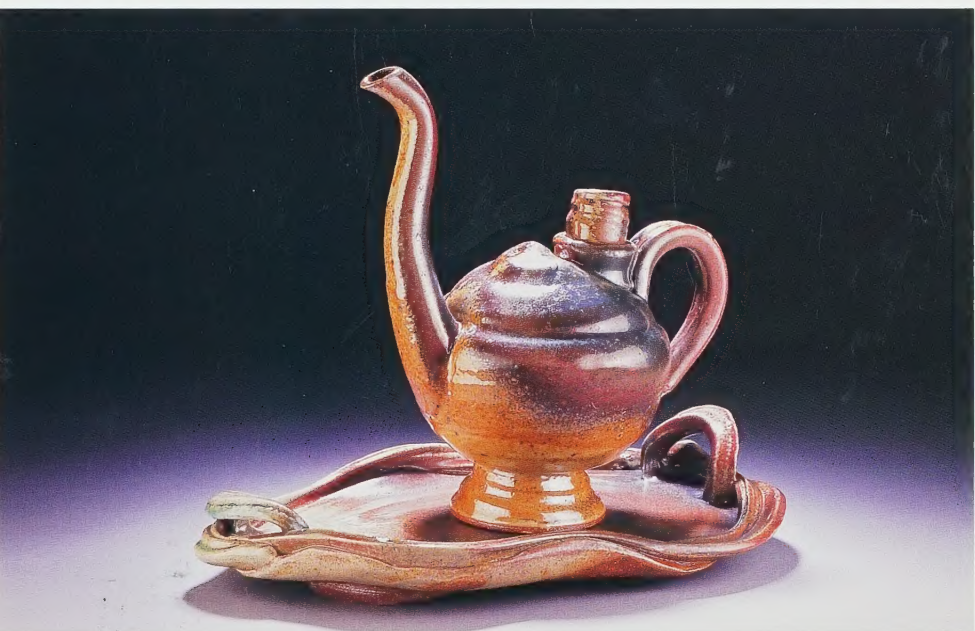
948. N. Alabama Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
Tele: 317.634.3114  
Hours: Tues. - Sat. 11-6

Front: "Wedding Party Disaster", oil on canvas, 36"x46" 1996  
Back: "The Departure", oil on canvas, 46"x36" 1996  
Photo Credit: Michael Cavanaugh

All of Nancy Morgan-Barnes' life experiences enters her work. Her paintings, past and present, have always reflected the conditions of life in which she was engaged. It is this aspect that makes her work so original. We often speak of narrative painting in grand terms. But often the concept of the narrative has led us to see make believe worlds of the ideal and a daydreaming of better times. Nancy is no daydreamer. She is a narrative realist. She brings to all of us, visually, the complex role of the woman in our society. Her paintings have reflected and continue to reflect the role of the young and mature woman, the wife, the mother and the artist, working at balancing the multiple careers cast on her. In no way do her paintings reflect anything negative. Rather they reflect honor and dignity in the pursuits of her careers. Her paintings have been a running commentary of everyone's growth in her family. Through the composing in all of her works, one finds explicitly rendered, chaos and order, youth and age, family and friends, personal finances, food and meals in their preparation, friendship and adversity. There is a new mystery in her paintings that raises the current work another notch. It would be easy to compare Nancy to the great Dutch painters, but in all honesty, at a certain age in life, we become our own artist, the past is shucked aside and our own originality shows. Nancy Barnes is at that stage. She and her work are original.

Barry Gealt  
Professor of Fine Arts  
Indiana University







# The Gallery

109 East 6th Street  
Bloomington, Indiana 47408  
812-336-0564

Address correction requested



## NANCY MORGAN BARNES CHERI GLASER

Recent Work

November 7 to December 1, 1997

### OPENING RECEPTION:

Friday, November 7, 5:30 to 7:30 pm

### GALLERY HOURS:

Monday through Saturday 11:00 to 6:00

Sunday 2:00 to 5:00

Nancy Morgan Barnes  
"Light Source" 1996  
Oil on canvas  
38" x 48"

Cheri Glaser  
Coffee pot on tray 1997  
Wood fired clay  
13" x 12" x 7"

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*Dr. Alfred Barker  
Boxer Hotel Suite 622  
924 E. Geneva Ave  
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53202*







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Gallery Hours 11-5 Tuesday - Saturday - 12-5 Sunday

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THE TWENTIETH CENTURY GALLERY  
219 North Boundary Street, Williamsburg, VA 23185



**the twentieth century gallery**  
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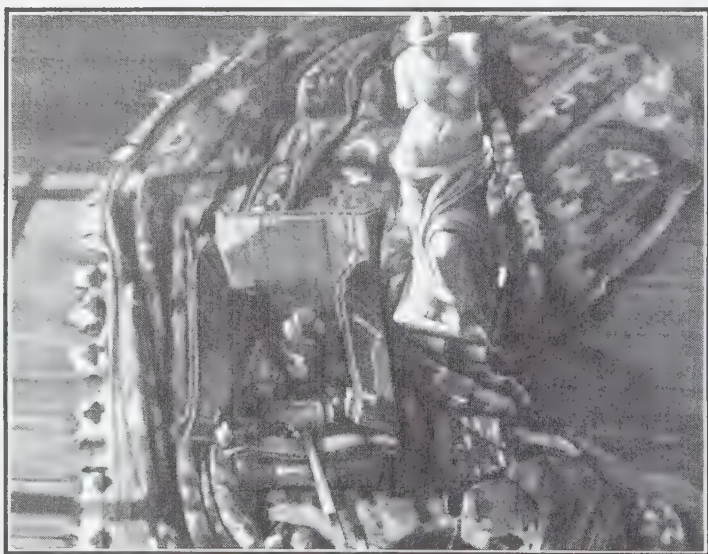
**oil paintings by**  
**lettie frazier**  
**nancy morgan-barnes**

**february 4 – february 29, 1992**  
**members preview february 3, 5:30 - 7:30 visitors welcome**





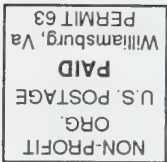
*lettie frazier* is a Lynchburg, Virginia painter who regards herself as a colorist, paints impressionist landscapes, and while she prefers oils, works in all media. She has exhibited in twenty-one solo shows and over fifty jurored exhibitions. Her paintings are included in private, government, corporate and college collections.




*nancy morgan-barnes* of Bloomington, Indiana, is a graduate in fine arts from Indiana University who spends her summers in Italy. Her still lifes of domestic interiors range in size from the very small to large. She has exhibited regularly in Italy and in Indiana since receiving her MBA in 1971.



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219 North Boundary Street, Williamsburg, VA 23185

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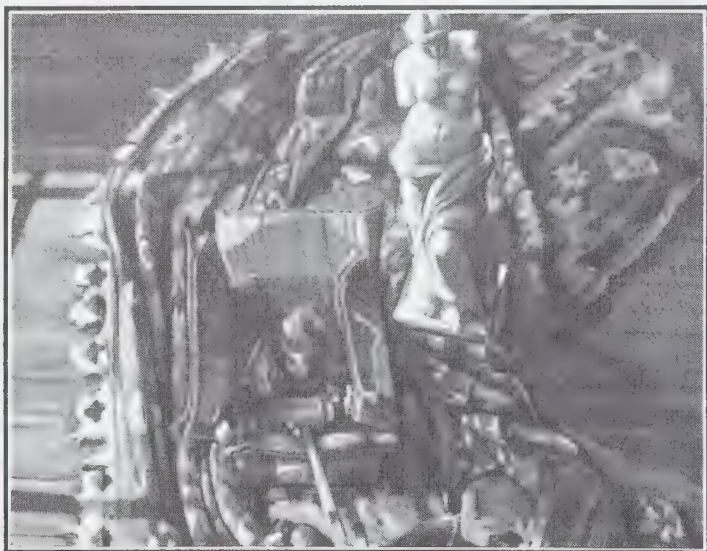
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**Nancy Morgan-Barnes Paintings**  
**At Patrick King Contemporary Art**  
**through July 17**

"Neither art nor nature is as smooth as glass," the art historian E.H. Gombrich wrote in his introduction about the great Dutch still-life painters of the 17th century. "Nature reflected in art always reflects the artist's own mind, his predilections, his enjoyments and therefore his own moods."

The intensely realistic images in the sumptuous Dutch still-lives of flowers, Persian carpets, books, china and objects go far beyond the academic requirements of representation. These paintings become idealized moments and environments within the flow of time and history.



**Art**

By Lydia B. Finkelstein

The images sum up the cultural and economic interests of 17th century Holland.

Morgan-Barnes' oils of domestic interiors, Bloomington in fact, with Indian rugs, plants, sewing machines, skulls, art postcards, musical instruments, clocks and keys are contemporary versions of the Dutch "vanitas" paintings. The casual clutter of her still lifes reveals the many layers of the artist's preoccupations: the culture of the Old World, especially Italy; Indian rugs from the New World's more recent past; classical music; and modern conveniences. These conveniences, including the telephone and typewriter, contrast dramatically with the slower reflective pace of the past with its emphasis on hand-craftsmanship and personal patronage of the arts.

The color tonalities in Morgan-Barnes' paintings are grayed and yellowed cereuleum and ultramarine hues that give off a sense of nostalgia and surrender to the past, with shadows of a cool titantium white playing over the quiet arrangements. Her compositions of interiors, such as "Crystal Heart Doorway," are essentially still lifes, even though the figure of a child facing into the room is placed just inside the open door.

In "History Door," a dark hand-print and carved initials on the white, partially opened door remind you of the human presence. On the floor of the 85-inch vertical painting an opened purse spills open to reveal keys and pills. The intense colors of the Indian rug thrown over the top of the door remind you that the past and present exist within us simultaneously, pulling us both forward and backward into our own time warps.

This is reality, but within a



courtesy photo

Bloomington artist Nancy Morgan-Barnes' "Crystal Heart Doorway" is included in her current one-woman exhibit of paintings at the Patrick King Gallery in Indianapolis through July 17.

personal meditations. "Departed Figure" is a large, comfortable old chair with a skull nesting casually on its seat. In the background a

upright piano, and a postcard reproduction of the Mona-Lisa is pinned to the wall. Morgan-Barnes paints with lush overtones, drawing loose-

ly with the paint to create a highly tactile surface that orchestrates pattern, form, color tonalities and light that almost seems to glow. The cracked blue china coffee cup on the chair arm, and the skull, remind us that after all passes, it's the artists who leave behind the remnants of civilizations.

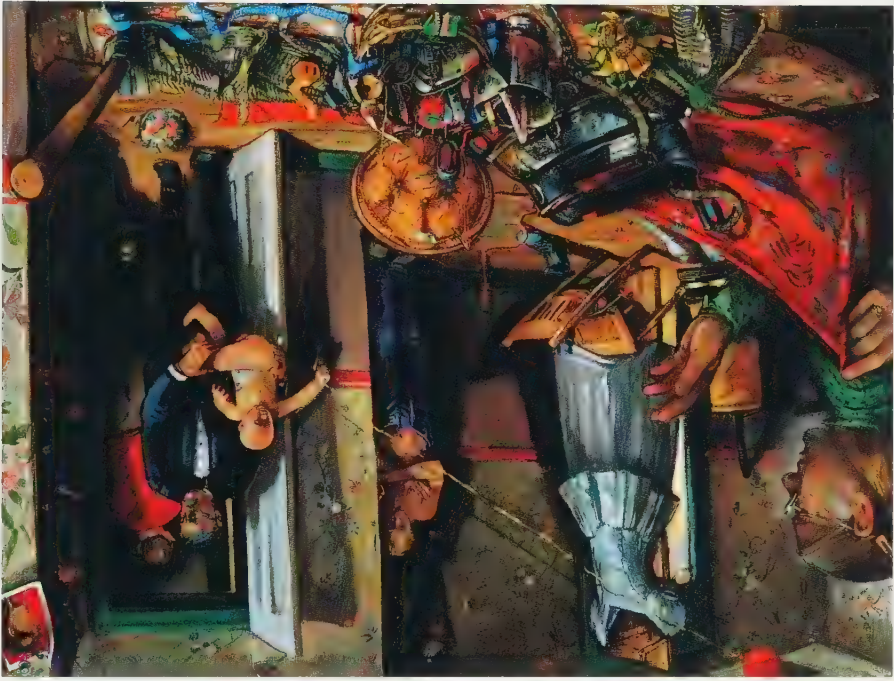
Morgan-Barnes spends each summer in Italy, coming home in the fall to work in her Bloomington studio. Her sense of time, and what makes up the days of our lives, is symbolized in the images of ordinary "things" she transforms into personal poetry. She has been exhibiting her work regularly, both in Italy and Indiana, since receiving her MFA from Indiana University in 1971. The paintings, all completed in 1989/90, range from small still lifes 6 1/2 x 7 inches to large 85 x 38 inches interiors, are priced from \$300 to \$4,500.

**Patrick King Contemporary Art, 427 Massachusetts Ave., Indianapolis. Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays. (The gallery will close for vacation June 22-July 10). Telephone: (317) 634-4101.**











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Barry Gealt  
Professor of Fine Arts  
Indiana University



Dear Alfred and Osobel,

Once again you timed your visit at a point in which I needed encouragement. I always feel elevated and eager to work after our encounters. Thank you.

I tried Xeroxing these articles a number of times but without a great deal of success - If they are in any way useful for your purposes let me know. We hope to pass through Milwaukee this summer, if possible, so perhaps I will be able to see your gallery.

Sincerely

Jancy Barnes  
731 E. University  
Bloomington, In  
47401

M. Barnes  
Barnes

(A)



near of



COMMITTED TO THE LITERARY, PERFORMING AND VISUAL ARTS

# ARTS INDIANA

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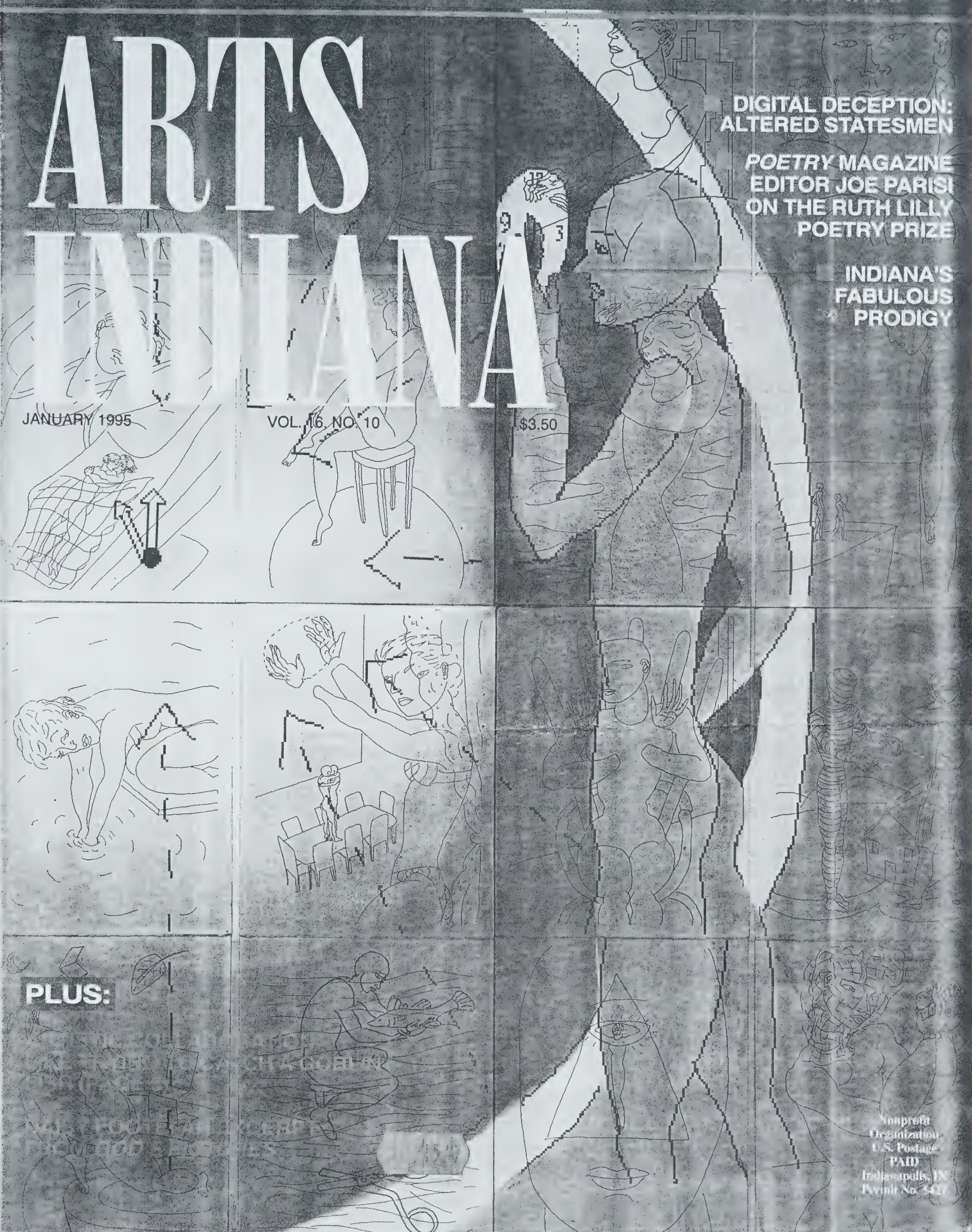
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EDITOR JOE PARISI  
ON THE RUTH LILLY  
POETRY PRIZE

INDIANA'S  
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JANUARY 1995

VOL. 16, NO. 10

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## Making It Real



*Heavy Wings, Self Portrait, 28"x32", oil on board, 1992*

In an era when much contemporary art is "off the wall" and filled with novel, attention-grabbing objects, Nancy Morgan-Barnes's style of painting things is traditional but no less challenging. "Art today is assumed to be subversive," says Barnes. "Our society insists that it break down barriers and gain its credibility from being new."

Barnes draws many of her subjects from a personal fund of past imagery. She feels that her paintings are read as "a personal archeology or antique." Her works are filled with objects that had currency for her parents' generation—a typewriter, sewing machine, an obsolete globe, decoys, etc. While they have lost their potency for current generations, they function as powerful shapes for this artist—who collects old objects and past experiences.

A realist painter, Barnes is primarily concerned with the art-making process, which she finds "profoundly humbling." She uses things to establish formal configurations about the relationships between images. "Once established inside the painting, there is a further unfolding of narrative through smaller components which are set up as episodes leading back to the entire picture once again." While working representationally, Barnes says that "the process doesn't make it real

any more than works of art with either a political or social message have an automatic impact for change."

Her current work on a large-scale painting has added to the difficulty of intertwining procedure with content for the artist, who often apologetically describes her work as conventional, defending it and the "tradition it stems from." Although she tries to bring to each new painting knowledge from the previous work, every new attempt feels fresh and difficult. But she is quick to add, "I suppose the excitement and mystery of trying to breathe life into a blank canvas is the fundamental reason of why we put ourselves through all this."

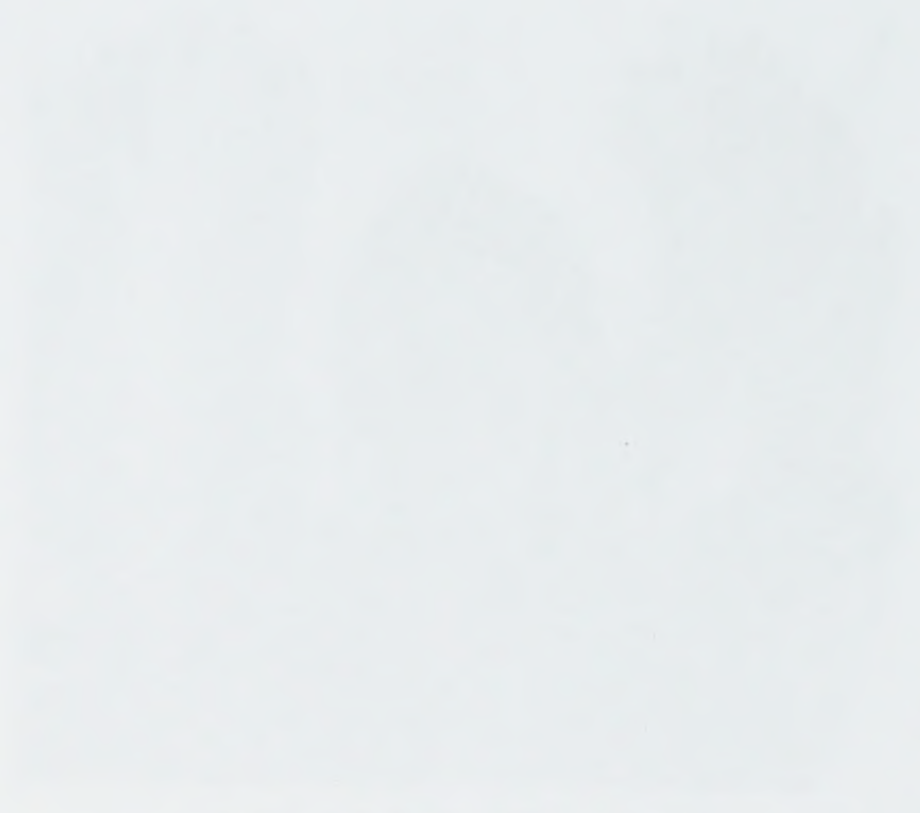
Barnes's struggles with this painting bring to mind a poignant letter written by Eva Hesse in 1965 about the challenges for women in art: "I wonder if we are unique...A woman is sidetracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and 'young' and having babies. She also lacks conviction that she has the 'right' to achievement. She also lacks the belief that her achievements are worthy. A fantastic strength is necessary and courage. I dwell on this all the time." ■

—Helen J. Ferrulli

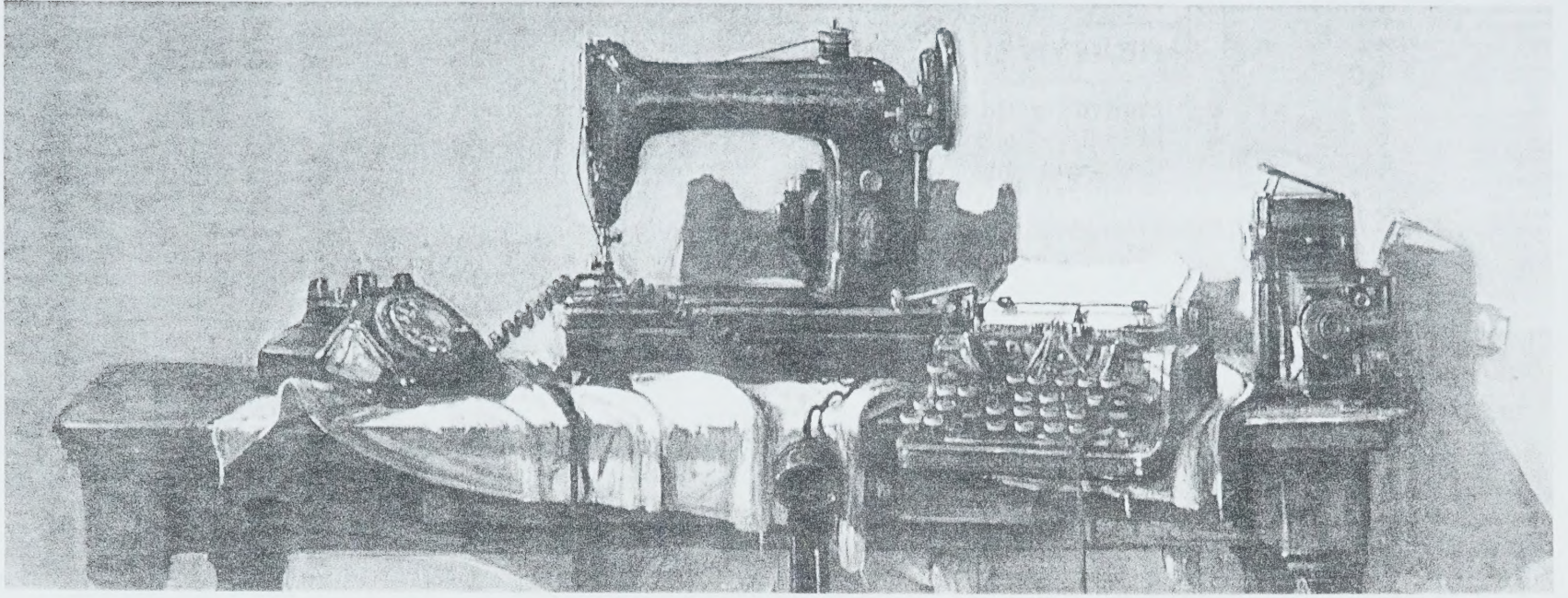




Making it Real

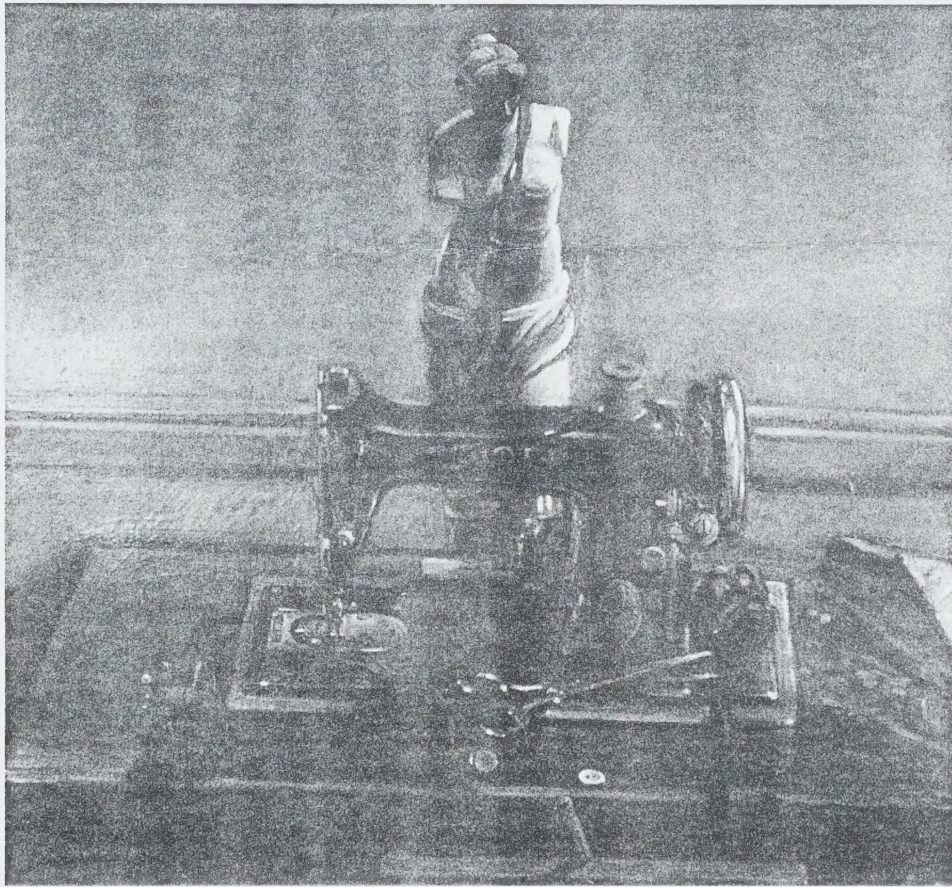






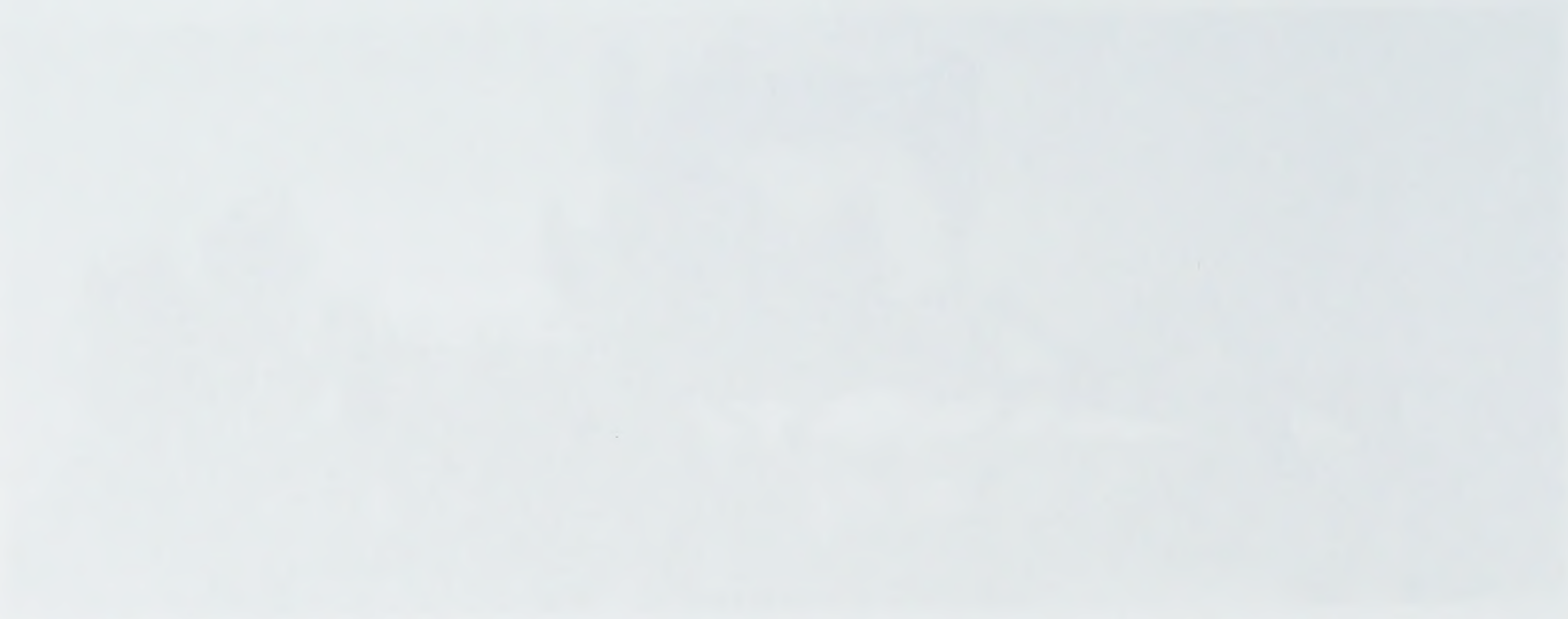
*Alterpiece to an Era, 18" x 42", oil on canvas, 1990*

Work by Nancy Morgan-Barnes may be seen in this month's "In Indiana," a special exhibition area in the contemporary galleries of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, where each month is spotlighted work by the artist featured in the "Portfolio" section of *Arts Indiana*.



*Redressing Antiquity, 38" x 32", oil on canvas 1989*





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