

# At The Museums

By David Barrows\* and Anthony L. Harvey\*\*



Joseph Mills, "Untitled, Washington, D.C.," c. 1982-89.

## CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

1400 New York Avenue, NW  
 www.corcoran.org  
 Open: 10am-5pm; Thu. to 9pm

*Inner City* is a deeply evocative series of black and white photographs capturing scenes with real people during the mid to late 1980s in a decaying, downtown, Washington, D.C. The first solo museum exhibition of local photography presented in a handsome, gallery installation. In a series of 50 photographs ranging from 8x10 to 11x14 inches, Mills captures the decay and dissolution of the urban surroundings in the nation's capital during the

heartless years of the 1980s when social service programs were cut back or eliminated and the Washington business community completed its shutting down of the department store, restaurant, nightlife, and small retail vibrancy of the downtown district.

Mills' "Inner City" candid camera depicts both those (people and establishments) hanging on to some vestige of presentability, and those whose brutally and aggressively presented failures in life have been left derelict and almost totally abandoned. Taken almost at random (and Mills did not use his viewfinder when snapping these shots), these photographs reflect neither judgment nor condescension. Joseph Mills, both by his own assertions and in lights of his demonstrated photographic results, is at one with his subjects.

The historical appear-

photographs are [also] coated in varnish and mounted to found objects, including lumber, suitcase lids, aluminum sheeting, pieces of furniture, and discarded architectural details such as doors."

The Corcoran's summary assertion of this marvelous show is both eloquent and poignant. "Bearing witness to painful realities, Joseph Mills' extraordinary photographs transcend documentary expression," states Paul Roth, a Corcoran photography and media arts curator. "Mills' perspective is compassionate and hopeful, and despite their often painful scenes of reality, his images are often characterized by an odd grace." On view through April 14.

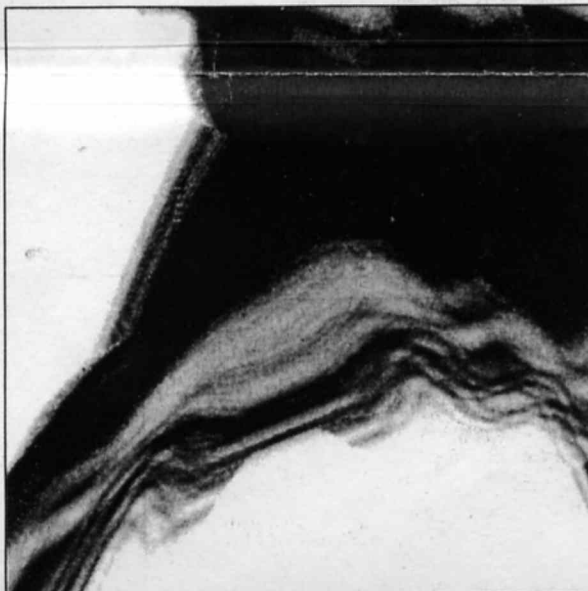
—Anthony L. Harvey

## MEXICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

2829 16th Street, NW  
 Tel., 728-1628;  
 Web, embassyofmexico.org  
 Open: Tue. - Sat., 11am-5:30pm

### Visual Arts at the Mexican Cultural Institute-through March 31, 2003.

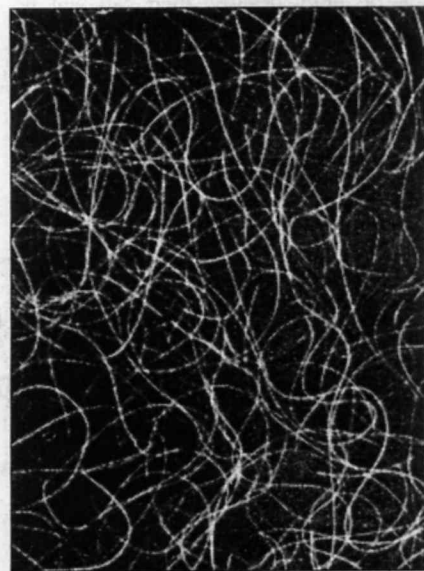
With a verve and vitality unusual in any venue, the Mexican Cultural Institute is currently hosting "fission/fusion"—an exuberant exhibition of six contemporary visual artists from Mexico City and six from Washington, DC. Colorful, engaging, challenging, and diverse, the work of these 12 artists ranges from cool, lush abstract celebrations of paint (with a couple of red drips to boot) by Maggie Michael to luscious, glistening tapestries such as that made of grid-hinged small, clear plastic containers of Chinese carry-



Antonio Sanchez, "reflexio á," 2003

sheer visual beauty it would be hard to beat the digitally-produced graphic images of sumptuous color abstractions by Antonio Sánchez.

A favorite work on the show's opening night was a short, three-minute animated video by Pedro Reyes described as "morphogenetic, concerning the origin and evolution of form." Heuristic in construction, the work is engagingly delightful,



Paula Crawford, "untitled," 2002

non-obvious, and to this viewer, both playful and profound. Among the most intriguing of the show's installation work is that of Brandon Morse, whose sculptural, digital video, and sound constructions engage the viewer in a primordial exploration of what appear to be esthetic investigations.

The strongest work in this very strong show are two abstract and beautifully patterned colorful paintings by Paula Crawford, who describes painting as "an antidote to official media culture." Other fine artists represented are Mauricio Alejo and his ingenious photographs of illusionary utopias, Héctor Zamora's nylon thread, geometric framed puzzles, and Santiago Borja's wonderful abstractions of boldly imaged and squiggly overlaid presentations of paint.

This thoughtful exhibition was curated by Berta Kloteniuk of Washington, DC (whose terrific one-person show at the Mexican Cultural Institute was reviewed in a previous issue of *The InTowner*) and Gabriela Molina of Mexico City. Sponsored jointly by the Instituto de Mexico and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the show will remain on view through March 31.

—Anthony L. Harvey