

# GALLERIES: Temporary works pursue poetic drama

## Artists show metaphor for fragile planet

By Mary Abbe/Staff Writer

With an elegant arrangement of deceptively simple materials — moss and leaves, ashes, ice, glass, pigment and small instruments — New York artists Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel have fashioned a metaphoric image of our fragile planet. That their new installation, on view at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design through May 5, falls short of its grand ambition does not diminish the significance of their effort or the beauty of what they have achieved.

For the past six years, Jones and Ginzel have collaborated on elaborate artworks installed temporarily in galleries, museums and parks around the world. In New York City, their work has appeared under the Brooklyn Bridge and in City Hall Park as well as at the New Museum of Contemporary Art and numerous galleries. They also have done work for a contemporary art museum in Prato, Italy; a *kunsthalle* in Basel, Switzerland, and an international art exposition in New Delhi. This is their first Twin Cities installation, although Walker Art Center and Northrop Auditorium previously commissioned them to design backdrops, costumes and lighting for a 1989 performance by the Merce Cunningham dance troupe.

Typically Jones and Ginzel combine such ephemera as wind, steam, sparks and flame with such more substantial things as marble, charred wood and chalk dust to create miniature, poetic universes. Their constructions have included large disks covered in gold leaf, a pool of water and small, quivering, copper globes. Earlier pieces have involved complex lights, plumbing, timers and motors to rotate propellers, swirl disks, spit flames, spray water or illuminate artificial landscapes and abstract dioramas.

As their recent Indian project suggested, they are not afraid to push the theatrical boundaries of art in search of poetic drama. Called "Plethora," the New Delhi piece was conceived as a visual representation of a life cycle embracing birth, death and reincarnation. Executed outdoors, "Plethora" was a three-dimensional drawing that included a pile of white marble eggs (birth), a pyre of burned wood (death) and a placid white bull tethered in the center of a circle of marble dust (reincarnation).

As that work implied, Jones and Ginzel are interested in concepts of time, and many of their pieces involve devices that call attention to time's passage — disks or propellers that move almost imperceptibly slowly or, in the installation at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, a metronome that rhythmically marks off moments and a block of ice that dissolves daily.

The installation at the college consists of a vast, rectangular "field" composed of 5,000 small glass bowls, many of which contain ashes or puffs of charred paper that blossom like malignant poenies. Near the center of the field are a few bowls containing red or blue pigment or gleaming water. At the center a stockade of tree trunks surrounds a smaller rectangle of red pigment under a sheet of glass on which the metronome and other measuring devices are perched. A small, dome-covered island of moss nestles near the red rectangle, and an obelisk of ice melts into a black basin at one edge of the field. Bits of green appear in the form of a leaf on a magnifying stand and leaves floating in basins carved into the column tops.

Called "Naos" after the inner sanctum of a Greek temple, the installation has a quiet, meditative quality that derives from its orderly, repetitious arrangement of circular and cylindrical forms, its somber colors and the almost imperceptibly quiet tick of the metronome. The contrast of colors, textures and shapes — of velvety ash and rough bark; black ash and red pigment; circles, rectangles and obelisks — creates a satisfying panorama.

The leaf on the magnifying stand invites viewers to contemplate the fragility and astonishing beauty of living matter. Seen through the glass, its crinkled ridges explode to forestlike proportions. Each velvety hump becomes a miniature mountain, and the pale veins seem broad as highways or rivers.

The installation's strength is its ability to suggest both the microcosm as seen in the leaf, and the macrocosm represented by the ash-filled bowls. The latter are best viewed from the gallery's stairway and balcony. Seen from above, the field of bowls expands like a land-

### Naos

**Who:** Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel.

**Where:** Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 2501 Stevens Av. S., Minneapolis.

**When:** Through May 5. Weekdays, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.

**Tickets:** Free.

**Review:** In this elegant installation, New York artists Jones and Ginzel use carefully arranged bowls of ash, water and colored pigments; a stockade of tree trunks, an obelisk of ice, a dome of moss and a few leaves to suggest the fragility of life and the elusive passage of time. Although it falls short of its grand ambition, it is a handsome attempt that turns the gallery's airy space into a theater-in-the-round.

ing strip or a city viewed from an airplane. Some of the bowls appear as dark craters piercing the earth, while others glisten like silvery lakes as light bounces off the shimmering water.

The balcony view also indicates how well the artists have used the gallery's airy, wall-less space. Many of their previous installations have been set up as dioramas or peep shows designed to be viewed at eye level from a single direction. By using the balcony as a viewing platform, they successfully convert the gallery into a theater-in-the-round.

Unfortunately, the theater seems a little large for this production, keeping viewers at bay rather than affording them the intimate contact and sense of enclosure that seems to have been a key to creating the illusion of a world-in-miniature that made their previous work effective.