

Art in America

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REPORT FROM CHICAGO

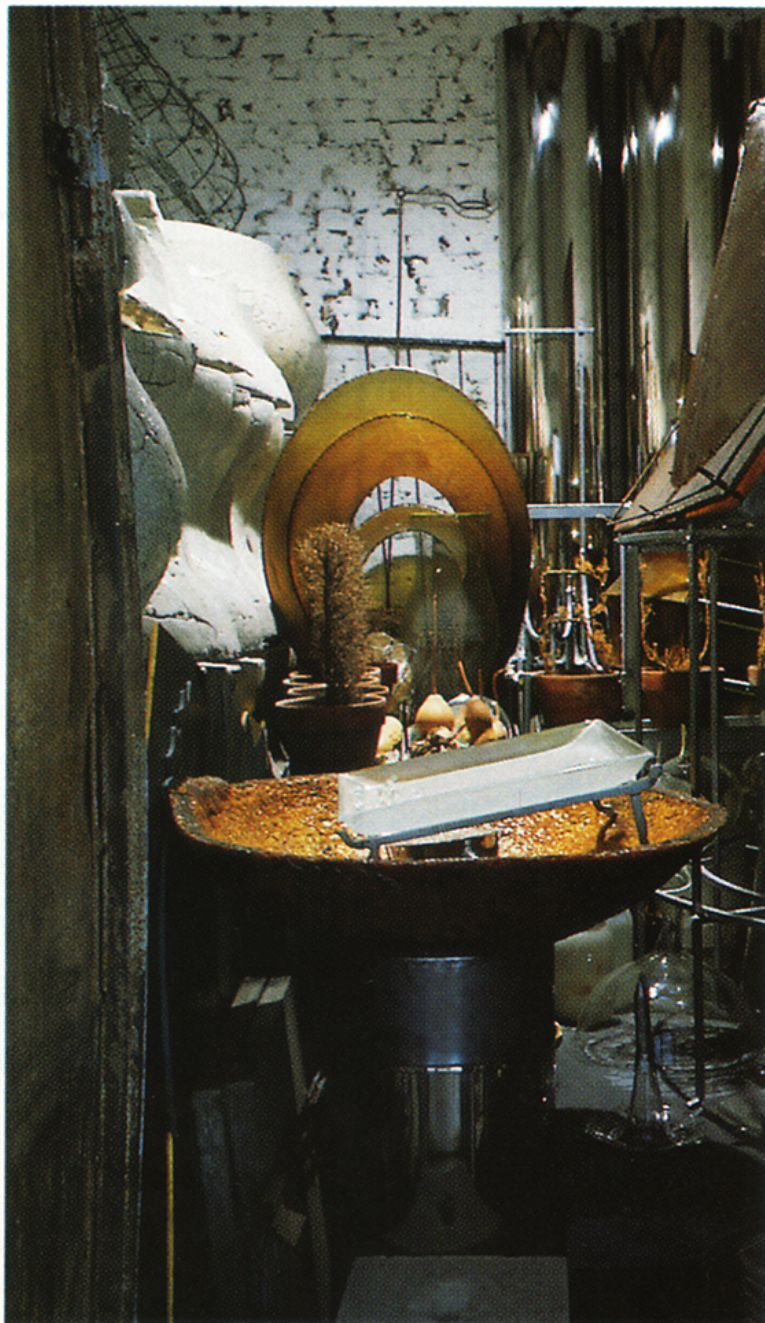
BY SUSAN SNODGRASS

Galleries and Alternatives: Expanding the Field

CPR and bona fide follow the example of the galleries known as the Uncomfortable Spaces, which originally included Ten-in-One, Beret International, Tough and MWMWM. This self-proclaimed group of director-owned galleries was organized in 1991 to provide an alternative to River North, and as a way of sharing resources while drawing viewers to their less-than-comfortable exhibition sites, scattered outside the city's main centers. Of the original group, Beret and Ten-in-One have relocated to Wicker Park and are the only two that remain. Tough shut its doors in February 1999; MWMWM closed up shop in 1996 and last fall reopened in Brooklyn. Ten-in-One director Joel Leib, discouraged by the lack of collectors supportive of local artists, is seriously considering moving his gallery to New York by fall '99.

Today, each gallery functions independently and has established its own identity. Ten-in-One is dedicated primarily to painting, while Beret's mission remains less defined. Tough focused on sculpture and installation. An exceptionally engaging solo show lately was Frances Whitehead's installation at Tough. For *antechamber*, as both the show and the work were titled, remnants of sculptures created by the artist over the last 15 years were stacked like relics in the gallery's brick vault. A Hydrocal cast of the vault's entrance became the doorway to Tough's main exhibition space, which was empty except for a light projection whose perimeter replicated the dimensions of the cryptlike chamber. Here, the dualities of absence and presence, temporality and permanence spoke metaphorically to the changing relationship of artists to their galleries and their work, and perhaps unintentionally to the shifting exigencies of Chicago's cultural infrastructure.

Although Tough was considered a for-profit gallery, it was one of the few spaces where one could find work of a noncommercial nature.



Frances Whitehead's installation antechamber (detail), 1998, showing the artist's stacked art works; at Tough. Photo James Prinz.