

# POETIC PEWS AT CALTECH

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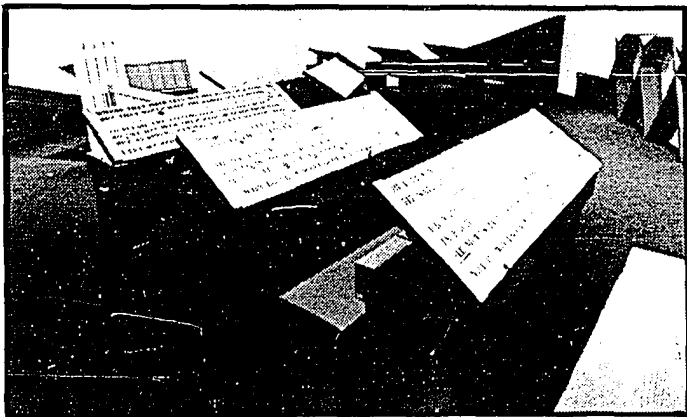
By SUZANNE MUCHNIC

Non-readers wandering into Siah Armajani's "Poetry Lounge," at Caltech's Baxter Art Gallery, through April 25, will see two rooms of stark, angular furniture, wainscoting and shelves partially covered with a baffling array of stenciled words.

Poetry buffs will recognize verses from Robert Frost's work, pause to read from books on shelves and wonder what all these friendly poems are doing in such an intimidating place.

Art folks, accustomed to odd combinations of objects and ideas, will probably examine the eccentric furniture (built roughly in picnic-table or fundamentalist-church style), sample a hard bench or two, ponder the wisdom of "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" and drift off with "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep."

Armajani, who teaches at the Min-



*Siah Armajani's "Poetry Lounge" juxtaposes poetry and angular furniture.*

neapolis College of Art and Design, has built a "Reading House," "Reading Gardens" and a "Newstand" in the East and Midwest. His "Poetry Lounge" at Baxter is a two-room installation. One is a churchlike milieu with a "pulpit" facing "pews" from which slanted wood slabs bearing Frost's "Mending Wall" can be

read. A painted wood device on a back wall holds poetry books in triangular nooks.

The other installation is less unified. It winds around the front gallery's oddly angled space and settles into reading desks with stenciled poems, a well-stocked bookcase, a fragmentary house

and a big square table with a hinged top holding "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," also by Frost.

Like artists of the Bauhaus, De Stijl and the Russian Avant-Garde, Armajani intends to integrate visual art with other forms. "Poetry Lounge" will be interpreted according to viewers' experience. In art terms it is a functional, "participatory" situation made accessible by places to sit and things to read. Armajani might have accomplished that with an easy chair and one book, but that would be so familiar as to have no effect and, besides, it wouldn't be art. His energetically constructed, many-faceted "Lounge" is an environment of a far more complex, and sometimes conflicted, sort.

The conflict arises in mixing two sensibilities—stark physical presence and intimate poetry. It's pleasant to sit and read the poems, but they seem to have little to do with their setting. Meanwhile, the wooden structure, admirable as it is in formal terms, proclaims itself so loudly as Important Art, it interferes with solitary reading.

Poetry readings will be held at 8 p.m. on Tuesdays, through April 20, at the gallery. Call 356-4371 for information. □

LARRY ARMSTRONG  
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