

The Fine, Painstaking Art of Arranging a Major Exhibition

By ROBERTA HERSHENSON

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SUZANNE DELEHANTY, director of the Neuberger Museum at the State University of New York at Purchase, believes art exhibitions should be "connected to something accessible." In "Soundings," the 1981 show she organized for the museum, objects intrigued viewers with both an aural and visual dimension. Creations resembling chairs and beds challenged perceptions in "Improbable Furniture," a 1977 show Ms. Delehanty curated for the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania.

In another attempt to provide art experiences "with many points of entry," Ms. Delehanty has put together an exhibition devoted to an ordinary, if symbolically potent, everyday object: the window.

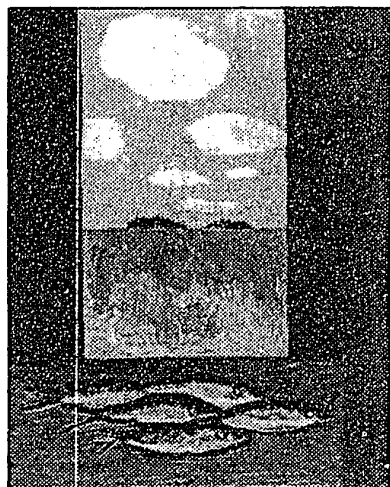
"The Window in 20th-Century Art," the Neuberger's current show, provides insights into the imagination of its originator as well as into the workings of one of the county's major cultural institutions.

Ms. Delehanty said she conceived the idea for the show about a decade ago while preparing an exhibition of works by Cy Twombly, an artist who uses the window motif frequently in his sketch-like pictures. The curator then began to give serious thought to the window as "a metaphor for the artists' blank canvas, and by extension a metaphor for the artist's studio, and by extension of that, a metaphor for the creative process."

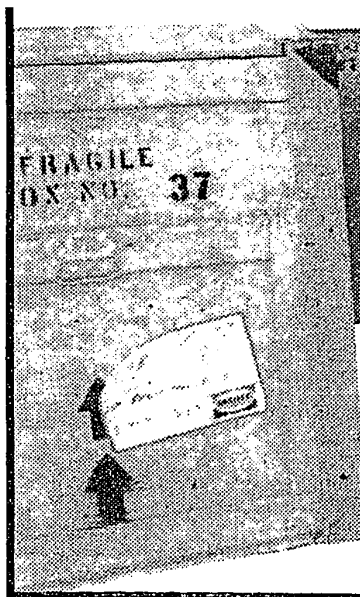
Because of the "long tradition of the window in Western painting," including its important role in the discovery of perspective, Ms. Delehanty said, she had been amazed to find that there had never been a major exhibition on the subject, although two small shows had taken place in Europe in the 1970's.

She began to plan the Neuberger exhibition by using "the slide bank of visual references in my head" to make lists and keep files on "all the window images I could think of." Eventually, the show was limited for practical reasons to the 20th century (the focus of the Neuberger's own collection), with a concentration on American artists. (Works by Matisse, Delaunay, Picasso, Dufy, Magritte, Chagall and other European artists are also included.)

Funds for the exhibition came from diversified sources, which Ms. Delehanty called "the best of all possible worlds, because it shows that Federal moneys for the arts do generate increased support from the private sector." The museum received a \$30,000 grant from the National Endowment



Suzanne Delehanty in the vault at the Neuberger Museum at the State University of New York at Purchase. "Sea Window, Tinker Mackerel" by Marsden Hartley is in current exhibition there.



for the Arts, a two-part award for planning and publication totaling \$26,000 from the Council for the Arts in Westchester, and other financing from Neuberger & Berman, the Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation and the Philip and Lois R. Stecker Foundation.

Ms. Delehanty likened the process of assembling an exhibit to a detective game. Tracking down the works and securing their loan for this show often involved for each one up to 10 or 12 pieces of correspondence with a long list of museums and private collectors, covering such matters as insurance, reproduction rights and shipping requirements. Shipping itself was a complicated procedure and often an art in itself, the director explained, because "the physics of the object" had to be taken into account.

Photographs of each work were also necessary, as were background materials to be used in the museum's educational programs. A research assistant, Sigrid Goldiner, and a special-projects consultant, Michael Reed, assisted the director in this effort.

Works arrived on a staggered schedule from all over the country. A sculpture by Siah Armajani came from Amsterdam on a flower plane loaded with tulips. The 80 paintings and sculptures in the show were held in the Neuberger museums immense storage vault while the installation was planned and prepared. A scale model of the galleries, complete with miniature versions of each work in the exhibition — created by a visual art student at the university — facilitated the hanging process.

For Ms. Delehanty, the selection of works and the installation decisions — the beginning and end of the curatorial process — are closely related. "Before asking for loans you think about connections," she said. "How

many chords can you strike in the viewer's imagination? You choose works in a context: those you've already selected help to shape the next choice."

Paintings that might at first seem closely related will not necessarily work well hanging near each other, the director noted. She cited Sylvia Plimack Mangold's "Floor With Light at 10:30 A.M." and Robert Rauschenberg's "Lightspill II," both dealing with the shadows cast by windows, as works that were "superficially similar but conceptually different."

"You get to know the works in a nonverbal way," Ms. Delehanty said. "You know when they won't work together."

Ms. Delehanty said she hoped viewers would make their own discoveries. She also said she hoped that "The Window" would help "demystify" much of 20th-century art, especially the nonrepresentational kind. "An abstract painting is really about an artist's view — a window," Ms. Delehanty said. "All works are ulti-

mately abstract, even if the subject is literal."

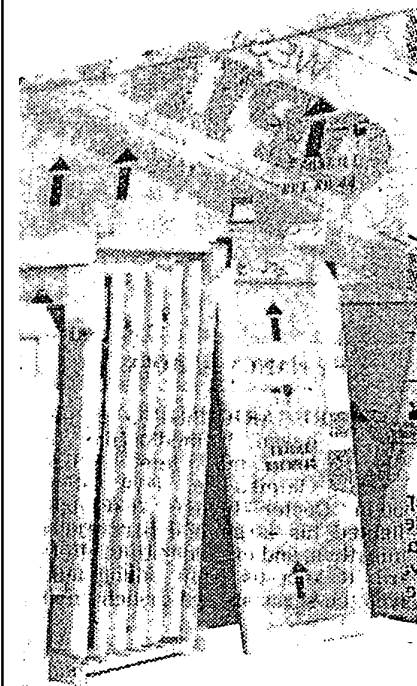
Referring to the grid-like patterns in four untitled works by Eva Hesse, which the artist said had sprung from the windows in her studio, and to the studio painted with painstaking realism by Catherine Murphy, Ms. Delehanty pointed out how differently artists use "the same elements over and over again." Seeing the "staggering inventiveness of the human mind," she suggested, "affirms our own inventiveness as people."

The director, who grew up in a small town outside Worcester, Mass., said she "got hooked on art" in the 1950's, when as a child she visited the Worcester Art Museum.

"I was especially taken by the Georgia O'Keefes," said the 42-year-old Ms. Delehanty, who now lives in Rye. "I was just amazed that anyone could make something that was that beautiful."

After graduating with honors in art history from Skidmore College in 1965, Ms. Delehanty did graduate

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"The Window" will remain at the museum until Jan. 18. In the spring, the exhibit will travel to the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston.

Ms. Delehanty's next curatorial project, scheduled for the fall of 1988, is entitled "Gaming" and will be a survey of artists' use of the image and procedures of board games and puzzles. On a recent morning, a visitor found Ms. Delehanty carrying stacks of books about games from her window-lined second floor office to the basement file room, where they will be used for research.

Ms. Delehanty's scholarly credentials, evident in her essays for the publications accompanying "The Window" (which also contains an essay by Shirley Neilsen Blum, professor of art history at Purchase) and "Soundings," are important at the Neuberger, which is dedicated to serving the university's students as well as the community at large. The director said that while the general response to "The Window" had been "heartwarming," she had really felt she "hit the jackpot" when two visual-arts students told her how much they had learned from the exhibit.

"They're your toughest critics," she said.

Another memorable tribute came from Tom Kluepfel, designer of "The Window" publication. On Ms. Delehanty's birthday, he sent a bottle of Windex.