

COMMUNICATION ARTS

MARCH/APRIL 1995 ■ SEVEN DOLLARS



RIGSBY DESIGN

BY CAROL ST. GEORGE

REMEMBER WHEN ELEGANT SIMPLICITY ruled the design industry with a velvet-gloved hand? Remember when designers approached writing as if it had meaning, as if the words would be read, absorbed, even pondered over? Remember when the idea, the big idea, mattered?

For a writer who bemoans the trend to disregard design as communication, Lana Rigsby, founder of Rigsby Design, is a dream interview. She cares about words. She cares about the ideas they convey and the impact they have on readers. And, lest you think this approach downplays the visual element, one glance at the work of this four-year-old Houston studio will quickly dispel that notion. In every piece, the message is wrapped in visual and tactile sensuousness. Whole books are built around provocative photography. Even surface textures are treated with reverence.

To Lana Rigsby, design is serious business. And without doubt, it's the business of communication.

For Rigsby, that means making sure the message is right; often it means working closely with a company's top brass to craft the idea, since the CEO's perspective represents strategically the highest vantage point in a corporation. Getting intimately acquainted with a company from the top down is *modus operandi* for Rigsby Design, a four-person firm specializing in annual reports, corporate communications and corporate identity. "We tend to get very involved with our clients," Lana says. "We know the announcements they're going to make, we follow the stock, we talk to analysts and even competitors. Design is the last five percent of what we do; the understanding part is the first ninety-five percent."

The firm's client relationships are as well-crafted as the corporate message. "Companies want a design firm that makes that client relationship a big priority. We want that, too. We want clients that will put a priority on our work together. So we really do a lot of sizing up."

How does a small design team possess the nerve to size up multi-billion dollar corporations? It helps to have a conviction of one's professional value. "Corporations really don't always understand what design can do. You have to have a very clear understanding of what you bring to the party and be able to communicate that convincingly." It

also helps to have outstanding training. Rigsby perfected her craft with nearly ten years tenure at Lowell Williams Design, and she speaks of her former associate with obvious regard. "He's simply the smartest person about this business I've ever met." No doubt his sense of the value of design made a big impact on his protégé.

It's an impression Rigsby has taken to heart, pursuing such high-profile clients as The Earth Technology Corporation, Simpson Paper Company and The Zoological Society of Houston, then designing communication materials for them that spotlighted both the clients and the firm. Winning in the Mead Annual Report Show three years running (and

next year's conference chair), generating two of the top ten U.S. annuals in *Graphis Annual Reports*, and having work not only honored in every major design competition, but included in the Smithsonian Institution's permanent collection, Rigsby shows no signs of allowing that spotlight to dim.

At the same time, she is quick to share recognition with the firm's other design-

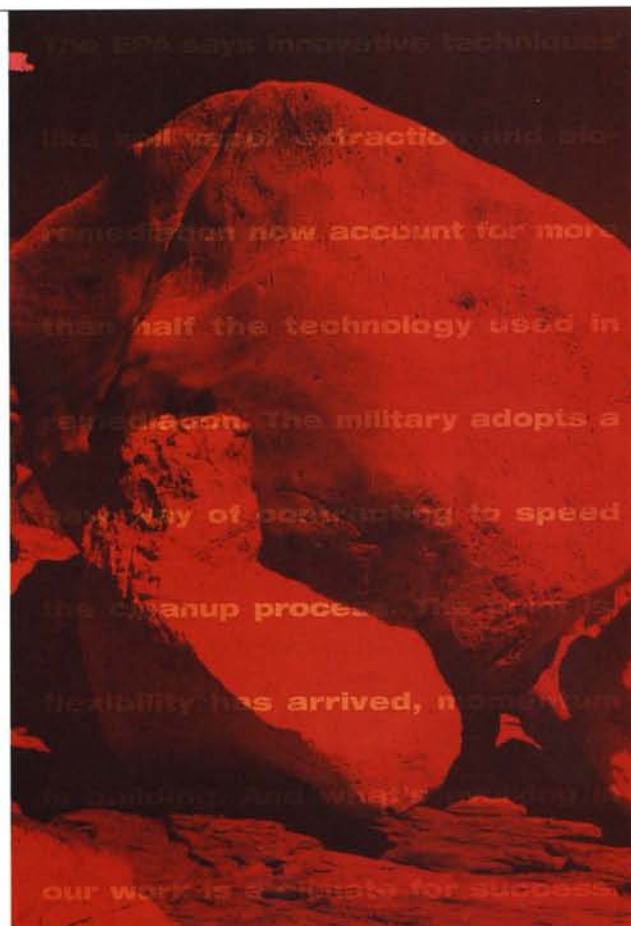
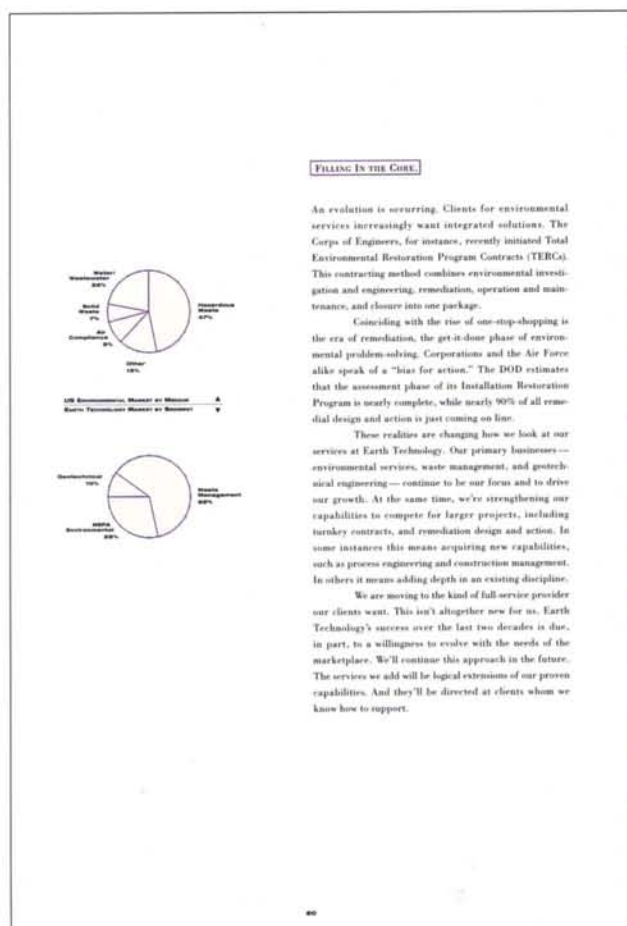
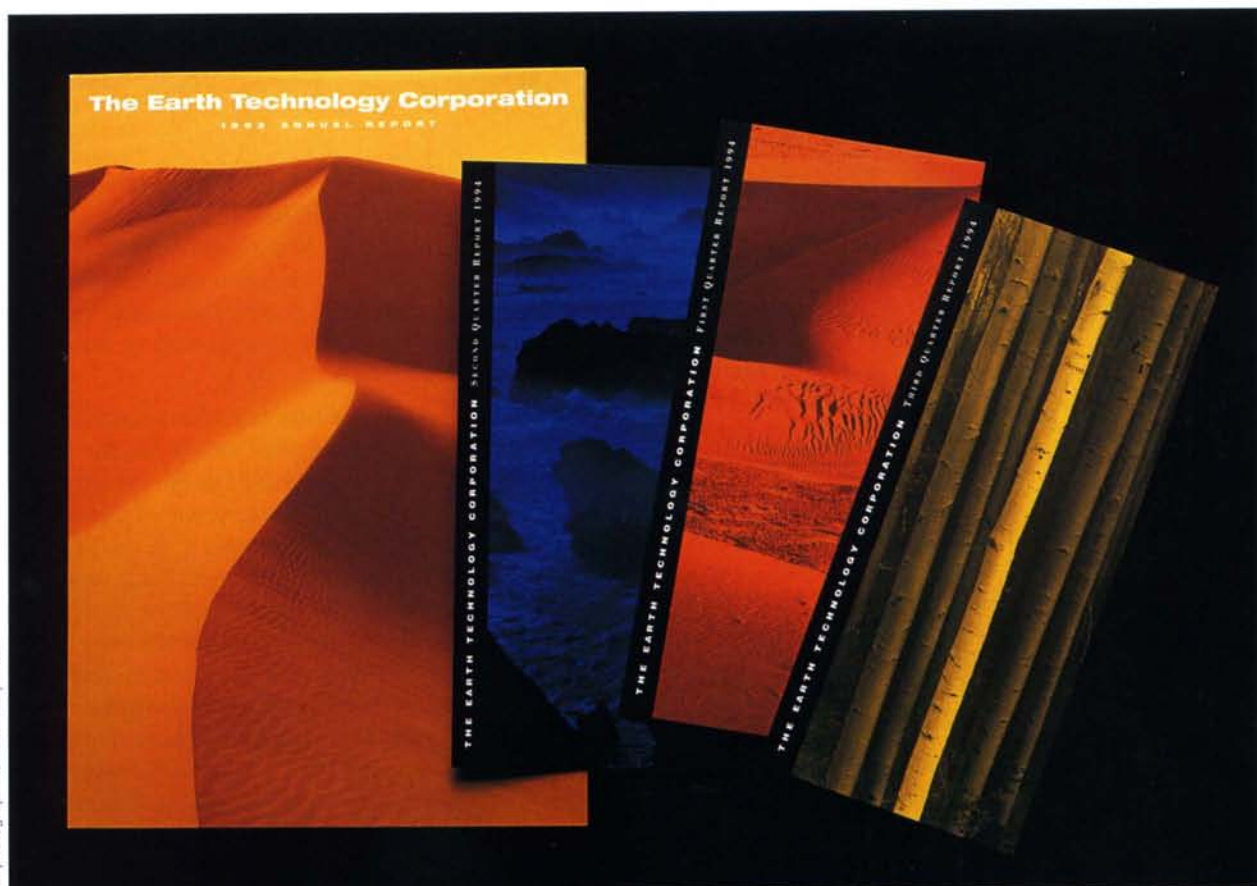
ers, Troy S. Ford and Michael Thede. The structure of the small but intense design team is deliberate. "We've kept the firm relatively small, and I think there's enormous energy in that. Big corporations have deconstructed less because of the economy than because new ways of working have made it the smartest way to go. The emphasis is no longer on the sheer manpower a design firm can bring to the project; thanks to technology, that's just not a factor anymore. The focus now is on speed, responsiveness, creativity; all the things that make a Porsche more fun to drive than a school bus."

Caption information supplied by Lana Rigsby, who was art director for all projects shown.

From left to right: Michael Thede, Lana Rigsby, Troy S. Ford.

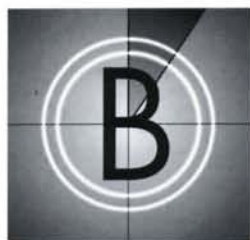
Right: "The Earth Technology Corporation is an environmental consulting firm providing a diversity of technically and legally complex services to business and government. An extensive design program reflects CEO Diane Creel's commitment to excellent communications as a way to make the firm 'stand out' in a crowded marketplace. Elemental images underscore the fundamental nature of the company's business; writing is direct and unsentimental throughout the program. The 1993 annual report tells an extraordinary story; the stock value roughly tripled within the year." Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford, designers; JoAnn Stone, writer; Gary Faye, photographer.







First Step



**GEORGE
HEDERHORST
AND COMPANY**
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
AND CONTRACTORS

While the design aesthetic driving the firm is certainly Rigsby's, she says, "Everything we do is the product of a team. Collaboration is central to our way of working." Collaboration with clients, as well as photographers, writers and printers. Because a high level of trust is paramount to such close teamwork, relationships tend to be well established, although hardly prone to complacency.

JoAnn Stone, a writer with whom Lana has collaborated for years, says, "She expects you to come to the table with input." And input can come from many sources. In creating "The Nature of Intolerance," a promotional piece designed for Fox River Paper Company, JoAnn suggested the photographic cover needed a title; photographer Gary Faye wrote it.

Photography is a noticeably important aspect of the Rigsby design strategy; not only is it a carrier of the message, but a means to raise communication to a high artistic plane. After all, if you're going to persuade people to pay attention to your message, you'd better capture their attention. Haunting, stark images and lean, unaffected design can be excellent tools to that end. Once content is established, Rigsby gives the photographer a lot of creative freedom. In fact, the final design work is done not before the photography takes place, but after. Rather than shooting to fit a box on a thumbnail, according to Lana, "We'll all agree on the intent; then we do the photography and build the book around it. All the photographers have to worry about is getting a great shot."

A simple idea. But simplicity is out of vogue in many design circles. A case in point is paper promotions, whose audience (ostensibly designers) might be expected to hold the work to the highest possible standards. To Rigsby that means real content, clearly articulated. Instead, she notes, they often degenerate into "meaningless frolic, or they're so crammed full of technical complexity that they forget to have a point.

"We're still talking about technology as though the 'revolution' is all about how designed things *look*, or how much easier production is. Well, OK, but I think the future lies in how we use it to make work that's richer, better informed, more relevant in the real world."

For now, Rigsby Design will continue design-

ing from the premise that the work the firm produces is in fact read, contemplated and acted upon. At the core of that work will be a persuasive message and in its thoughtful presentation, from the dramatic imagery to the sensuous texture, will be an enduring impression.

Even as the firm moves into more technologically sophisticated design media, it's a safe bet that the Rigsby Design dictum of spare structure and an economy of adornment will still apply. The approach is the natural result of taking one's role as designer very seriously. It's not a job for the faint of heart. As Lana says, "It might be much easier to play design waitress." But to position yourself as a resource for structuring the public face of a corporation—that takes guts. Something she has plenty of. "You're really responsible for something that's a whole lot bigger than colors or politics." The end product therefore must be something larger than a collection of words and pictures.

According to writer Stone, because of Rigsby's cerebral approach, "The products tend to have a life." From all appearances, intelligent life.



Name/logo/mark for First Step, a company providing computer enrichment classes to day-care and nursery school children as young as age two. "We came up with the name for this start-up company, which coincidentally was among our very first clients." Lana Rigsby, designer/illustrator.

Mark for Bloodstone Pictures, a film production company. Michael Thede, designer; Troy S. Ford, illustrator.

Logo for residential landscape architect George Hederhorst. Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford, designers; Tom McNeff, illustrator.

Right: "O. Henry One Dozen Stories, is the sixth in a series of limited edition classics produced by/for Heritage Press chairman Bob Downs, sent each year at Christmas to the firm's friends and associates. In a series of elegant, surrealistic photographs by Geof Kern, O. Henry, who began to write his stories from prison at the turn-of-the-century, is pictured imagining himself traveling the country. Words from the stories are configured to playfully illustrate the ideas they express." Lana Rigsby/Michael Thede/Troy S. Ford, designers/illustrators; JoAnn Stone, writer; Robert J. Downs, Jr., series director. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 7"; 98 pages; edition of 1,000.



of Scotland were all exhausted except the eye breed the old man unrolled me from the table leg and played me inside like a fisherman plays a salmon. Out there he took off my collar and threw it into the street. "Poor doggie," says he, "good doggie. She won't kiss you any more. 'S a damn shame. Good doggie, go away and get her over by a street car and be happy." I refused to leave. I leaped and frisked around the old man's legs happy as a pup on a rug. "You old flat-headed woodchuck-chaser," I said to him — "you moon-baying, rabbit-pouncing, egg-shedding old bangle, can't you see that I don't want to leave you? Can't you see that we're both Pups in the Wood and the missus is the cruel uncle after you with the duck towel and me with the flea powder and pink bow to tie on my tail. Why not cut that all out and be ponds forever more?" — Maybe you'll say he didn't understand — maybe he didn't. But he kind of got a grip on the Hat Scotchies, and stood still for a minute, thinking. "Doggie," says he, finally, "we don't live more than a dozen lives on this earth, and very few of us live to be more than 300. It's over now that for any more I'm a flat, and if you do you're flatter, and that's no flattery. I'm offering 60 to 1 that Westward Ho wins out by the length of a dachshund." — There was no string, but I hunched along with my master to the Twenty-third Street ferry. And the cats on the route now reason to give thanks that prehensile claws had been given to them. — On the Jersey side my master said to a stranger who stood eating a currant bun. — "Me and my doggie, we're bound for the Rocky Mountains." — But what pleased me most was when my old man pulled both of my ears until I howled, and said. — "You common monkey-headed, not rolled, sulphur-colored son of a deer mat, do you know what I'm going to call you?" — I thought of "Lovey," and I whined dutifully. — "I'm going to call you 'Paw.' —" says my master; and if I'd had five tails I couldn't have done enough wagging to do justice to the occasion.

You follow the

BROADWAY trail down

until you pass the

the **BREAD LINE**

of, and you come to

the **DEAD LINE**

the **BIG** cañons of

the MONEYGRUBBER TRIBE.

HUMPTY DUMPTY

sat on a wall.

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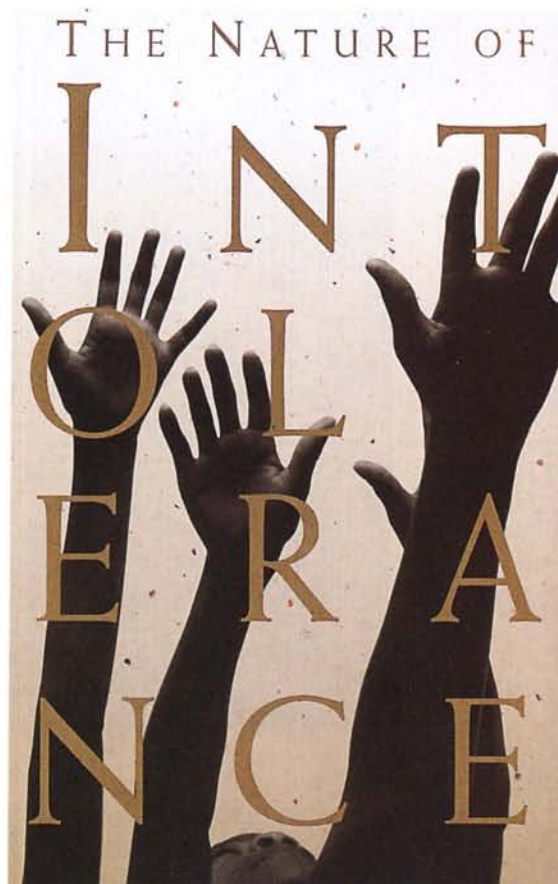
be all

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This page: "Cover of a paper promotion commissioned by Fox River Paper Company. This piece examines the cycle of intolerance that characterizes mankind's relationship to the Earth." Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford/Michael Thede, designers; JoAnn Stone, writer; Gary Faye, photographer.

Below and right: "The logo and materials for this upscale Austin restaurant were designed to complement the collection of modernist paintings showcased there. A limited edition of silkscreened posters was given to visitors during the opening celebration." Lana Rigsby, designer/illustrator.

U.S. Postal Museum grand opening announcement. "The invitation folds out to a length of almost 60", and shows stamps (several of which are rare and valuable) reproduced 10x actual size. The piece is die-cut to scale and mailed in an oversized glassine envelope. Stamps are used to illustrate the various exhibits, and a hand-applied 'Elvis' stamp accompanies party information. The Postal Service used a canceling insignia designed exclusively for this mailing; a CNN News story about the Museum predicted invitations bearing the insignia will become valuable philatelic collectibles." Michael Thede/Lana Rigsby, designers; Elizabeth Little, writer; The Pikes Peak Lithographing Co., printer; Hines Interests L.P., client.







You get to be good
at hands-on work by
doing it. The more you
do it, the better you get.
The better you get,
the more you get to do.



RIGSBY DESIGN

Left: Serv-Tech proposal/qualifications packaging system. "As a provider of maintenance services to heavy industrial facilities, Serv-Tech has the competitive strength of 'smarter people' in the field. These materials juxtapose dramatic, tightly-cropped black-and-white portraits of workers against fluorescent 'safety' colors. The box and folders are wrapped in dull sheet laminate, making them virtually impervious to wear and tear." Troy S. Ford/Lana Rigsby, designers; JoAnn Stone, writer; Chris Shinn/Jim Sims/Joe Baraban, photographers.



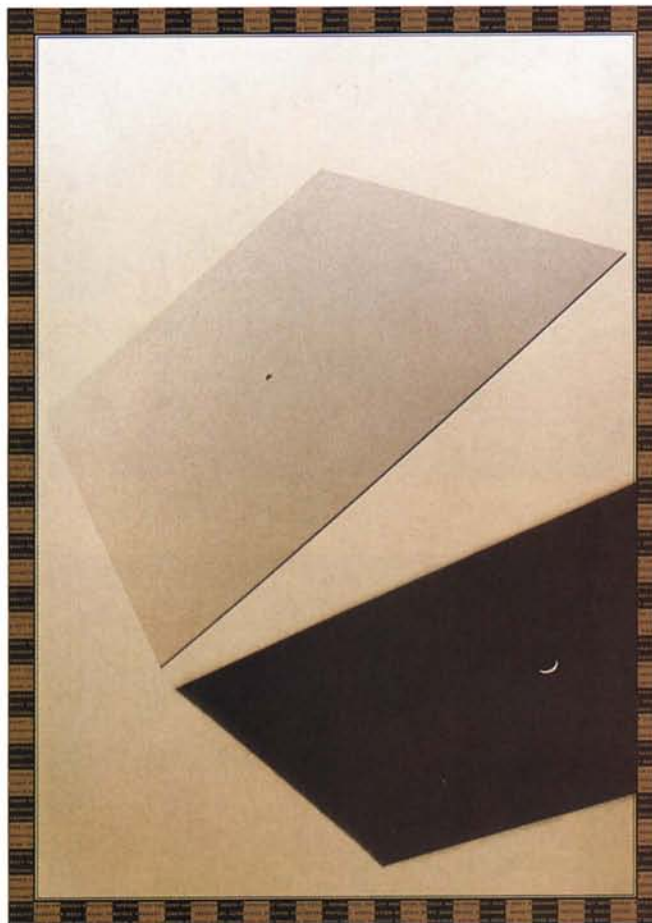
"Serv-Tech's 1991 annual report addresses a year of broad international and acquisition initiatives with 'Profiles in Initiative.' Gritty black-and-white photos of workers and *Wall Street Journal*-style executive portraits illustrate a plainspoken profile of the company, its people and its strategic plans." Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford, designers; JoAnn Stone, writer; Chris Shinn/Joe Baraban, photographers; Andy Dearwater, illustrator.

This page: Presentation Technologies identity. "Presentation Technologies provides audio-visual equipment and presentation support services to meeting planners, hotels and conference facilities. The logo illustrates the nearly universal slang for presentation. As the program has evolved, the dog performs a variety of tricks across different applications." Logo: Lana Rigsby/Andy Dearwater, designers; Andy Dearwater, illustrator. Stationery: Lana Rigsby, designer. Videocassette packaging: Troy S. Ford/Lana Rigsby, designers. Poster: Troy S. Ford, designer.



This page: Contemporary Arts Museum catalog. *Texas Between Two Worlds* documents an exhibition of contemporary Texas artists. The thematic exhibit focuses on 'looking at that which is real, but difficult to actually see.' The solar eclipse is a visual metaphor for passing 'between two worlds'—a moment that can only be viewed indirectly (as through a pinhole in paper). Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford, designers; Peter Doroshenko, writer; Troy S. Ford, illustrator; Chris Shinn/Lynn Girouard, photographers. 8½ x 12½; 96 pages.

Right: The Zoological Society of Houston 1992 Annual Report and 25th Anniversary Review. "This report reviews the society's accomplishments within a larger context of the 25-year-old wildlife conservation movement. Illustrated capital letters tell the story on a micro-scale, and Arthur Meyerson's 'executive portraits' of the animals form the visual centerpiece of the book." Lana Rigsby/Troy S. Ford, designers; Nancy D. Williams, project director; Steve Barnhill/Melissa Landrum, writers; Andy Dearwater, illustrator. 9¼ x 11¼; hand-sewn with Japanese paper wrapper.



PATRICIA RUIZ BATON

7 INCHES. *Te Mocholona* (detail) 1988-91

7 INCHES. *Te Mocholona* (detail) 1988-91

globe like and paper with metal, hand with mirror, distressed bone with paper, steel, dead flowers, wire basket, brass and iron coils. 52 by 180 by 10 (132.1 by 303.0 by 40.7). Clustering the artist.

Patricia Ruiz Baton creates casts of her own body from a mixture of palm blue and paper. These casts of lineless and often seamless figures dominate her oeuvre, pushing the limits of the self portrait. The figures become metaphors for the artist's life along the Texas-Mexico border. Living in Brownsville and crossing the Rio Grande each day to work in her studio in Matamoros, Ruiz Baton finds her daily life steeped in the hardships of south Texas border life. A working woman, a single mother and an artist, Ruiz Baton draws on the difficulties of this border environment and her own particular situation when creating her art.

In 7 *Inaugury: Te Mocholona* of 1988-91, a homage to the celebrated Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz with whom she studied in Warsaw, Ruiz Baton has placed a sequence of seven palm blue figures against a wall. The life-sized figures, achieving a small, dismembered Christ figure also found one day, are accompanied by dot-covered, more wooden forms. Situated in front of the figures, the bones contain dead flowers, dead corn husks, linen, paper and steel — traditional offerings. With the figures, the grouping resembles Mexican altar offerings assembled for the religious celebration Day of the Dead (la Noche de los Muertos).

In Mexico, the Day of the Dead is rooted in Hispanic culture. For the Aztec and Mayan Indians death is viewed not as an end but as a phase in the cycle of birth, death and resurrection. Celebrated in early November, the holy day gives divine permission to the dead to return to earth to visit family and friends. Ruiz Baton draws upon the age-old customs of this ritual, which permeates Mexican art and life, not only to transcend the borders of life on the border but to heal and secure her own mind and body.



7 INCHES. *Te Mocholona* (detail) 1988-91



1983 The Zoo's Australian Bush census, born in Houston, continues to breed according to Australian census—providing offspring in Houston exhibits.

1985 The Houston Zoological Gardens is accredited by AZA.

1986 The Institute of Museum Services grants the Houston Zoo \$25,000 to study the impact of animal exhibits on visitor behavior.

1988 Houston Zoo Director John Weller creates three new areas for outstanding naturalistic habitat conservation.

1989 Phase II of the Zoo's new large cat facilities is completed, providing updated homes for two species of cats.

1991 Zimbabwean rhinos that can block rhino in two daily to poachers. Rhinos are directed to night poachers on sight.

1992 The last wild California condor is captured for protection.

1993 Brown pelican Island along the Gulf Coast are brought to the Zoo for care by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

1994 Sixty-three rhinos return to the endangered species list, their numbers down to less than 1,000 animals.

1995 The Zoological Society of Houston creates the Houston Zoo's first support for events and programs of the Zoo.

Zoos also provide invaluable information and support for conservation efforts and agencies. The Houston Zoo has contributed significantly to world conservation efforts and has received international recognition for its successful captive breeding programs for birds and reptiles.

At the Houston Zoo and most modern zoos, this increasing emphasis on animal conservation is reflected in changing animal environments. Natural habitat exhibits, where animal enclosures and holding areas disappear into the landscape, allow the visitor total immersion in the "wild." These new habitats provide a protected yet naturalistic environment, with more space for the animals themselves and more privacy for nurturing their young.

Since 1980, many of these naturalistic exhibits have been constructed at the Houston Zoo. Major facilities include an aquarium, big cat habitats and new bird gardens. A new display for sea lions has also been added. A two-acre complex of outdoor habitats for primates will be completed in 1993.

Construction of such extensive and high-quality exhibitry, as well as related support and educational facilities would be impossible at the Houston Zoological Gardens without the commitment of the Zoological Society of Houston.

