

ARTS & BOOKS

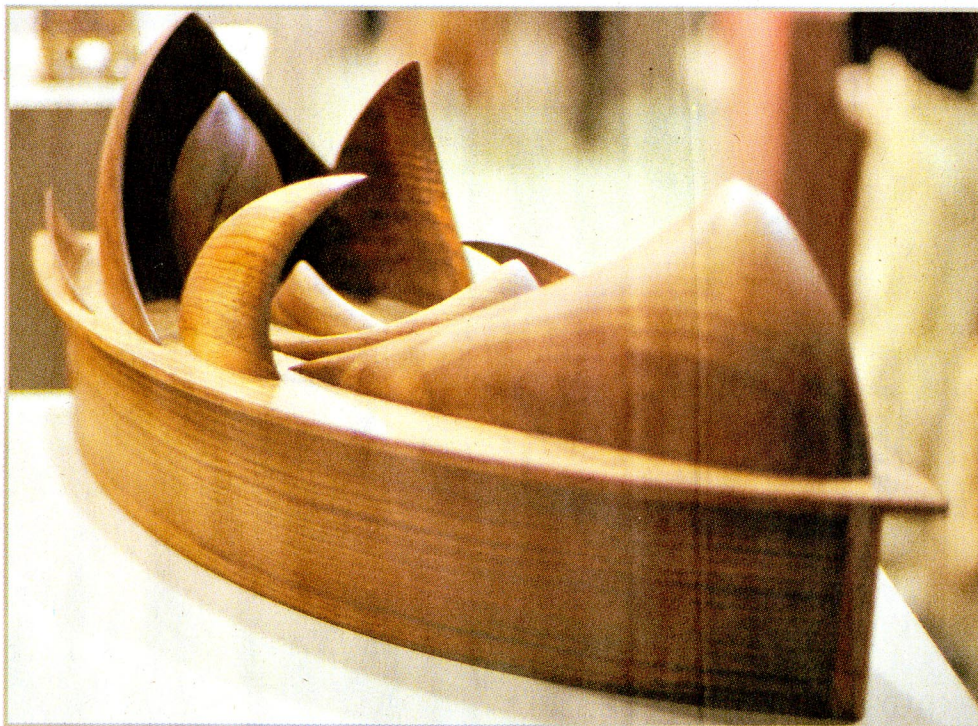
MUSIC • THEATER

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Sunday, October 5, 2008

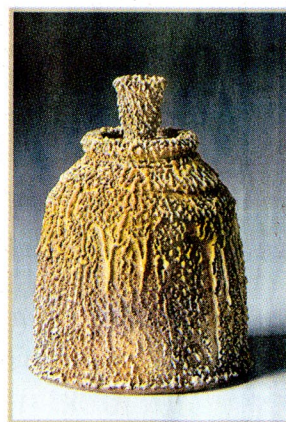
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DOUG HASLAM Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary

ASHES GO HERE: The vessel at left, by Doug Haslam, and "Crossing Urn III" are part of "Ashes to Art."



PAUL MCCOY Hillside Memorial Park

ON VIEW

Going out in style

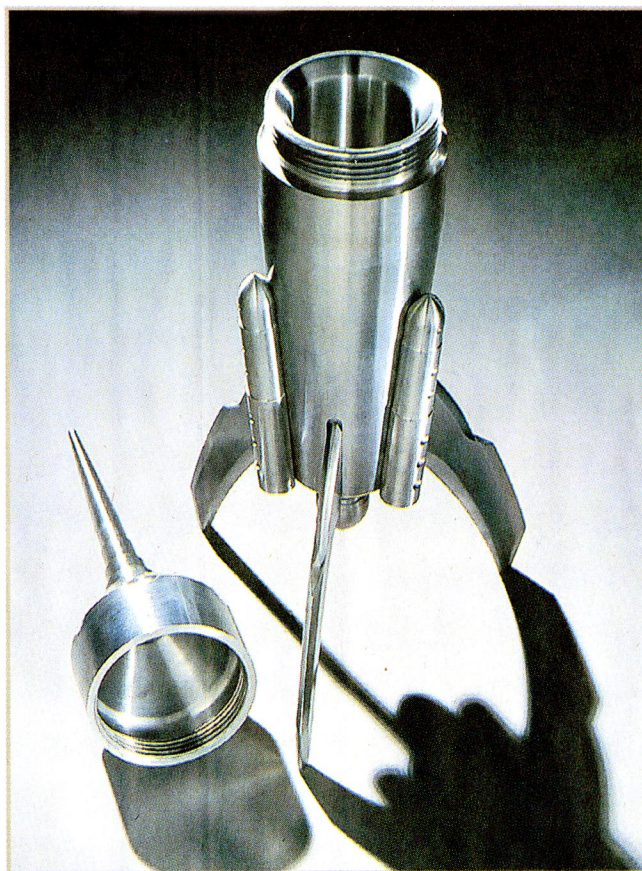
MANY have long believed there is an art to dying. The ancient Egyptians were obsessed with lavish preparations for the afterlife, including ornately carved sarcophagi. Tibetans have amassed an immense collection of literature devoted to the topic. Putting a more contemporary spin on the idea is Funeria, an arts agency and exhibition organizer that recently opened its fourth biennial "Ashes to Art" at its gallery in Sonoma County. On display is a mixed-media portfolio of urns, vessels and reliquaries devoted to containing ashes of the deceased.

"The funeral industry was lacking in the area of lidded vessels; all they had were wooden boxes with religious symbols or fly fishermen," says Maureen Lomasney, founder and president of Funeria. So Lomasney set out to promote the idea that urns could also be artworks and began the "Ashes to Art" exhibition as a way to lessen any feelings of discomfort among the artists who make the vessels or the people considering buying them. This year, Funeria received 650 entries from 63 artists around the world, including Slovenia, Canada, Mexico and Britain; more than 80 works were selected for the show, which runs through Nov. 30.

Among the urns are a solid aluminum rocket ship (designed by Christopher Rizzo, who also creates after-market parts for Ducati motorcycles) and a cast-bronze dog bust created by Joy Kroeger Beckner (the bust isn't just for pets; a couple of pure-bred dog breeders selected it as a future vessel for the husband). For ash-scattering, there are patina cast-bronze spoons from Carol Green and Lynn Hayes, and hollowed-out wooden scattering staffs by David Finn. And artist Rik Olson of Sebastopol has created a short film of a traditional Viking funeral in which the ashes of his father and brother were placed inside a wooden boat and cast off into a rushing river.

"The pieces on display are a way to maintain the ashes of loved ones that is personally special to them," says Mark Friedman, chief executive of L.A.'s Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary, which is sponsoring the show and is also displaying select pieces in its showroom. "These are works of art for the sake of preservation of ashes."

— LIESL BRADNER



CHRISTOPHER M. RIZZO Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary

GOOD LAST IMPRESSION: Christopher Rizzo, who designs parts for Ducati motorcycles, made an aluminum urn that resembles a rocket ship.