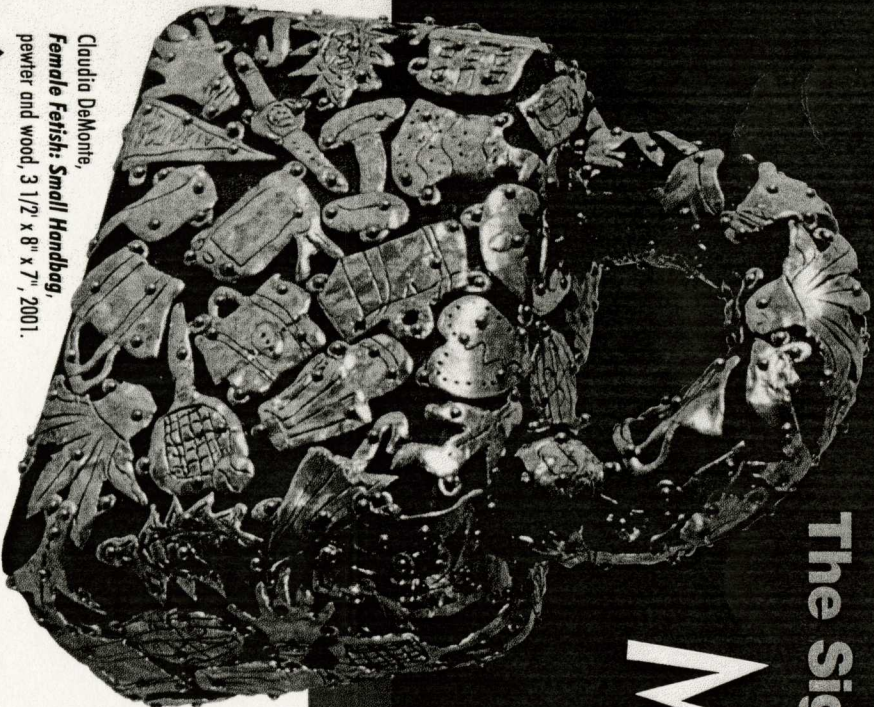


The Signs, They Are A'Changin'

MODERN ICONOGRAPHY

By Jennifer Reis

at Morehead State University

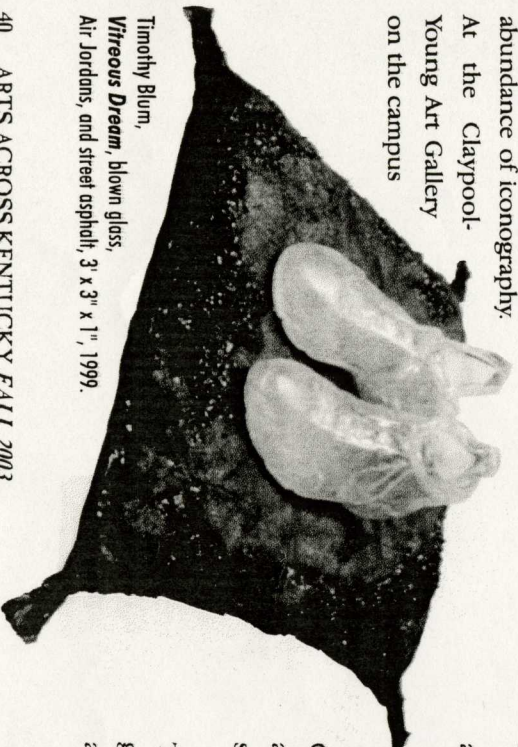


Claudia DeMonte,
Female Fetish: Small Handbag,
pewter and wood, 3 1/2" x 8" x 7", 2001.

Our public world is a lush landscape of images—the golden arches of McDonald's, Disney's Mickey Mouse, Microsoft's butterflies, and the Nike swoosh. Contemporary marketing dominates our symbolic language in the public arena; however, in the private and semipublic realm, these commercial icons, as well as religious, political, and personal symbols, carry many meanings. Symbols have transitory values and meanings dependent on their contexts and audiences. Some, such as the cross or swastika, have potent power. When governments use politically loaded images, this iconography is sometimes referred to as "propaganda."

In our contemporary culture, which is dependent on visual images developed by the modern mass media—television, magazines, and the Internet—we are overwhelmed with an abundance of iconography.

At the Claypool-
Young Art Gallery
on the campus



Timothy Blum,
Vitreous Dream, blown glass,
Air Jordans, and street asphalt, 3' x 3" x 1", 1999.

of Morehead State University, 23 artists who employ popular and personal symbolism in both obvious and subtle ways will be participating in the exhibition *Modern Iconography: Symbols Public and Private*, from October 8 to November 7. The artists, who were selected from a national call, have drawn symbolic inspiration from political sources, such as the abstracted American flag in Brenda Boyd's *Flag Waving*; the canon of art history (and concurrently, the canon of beauty) in the works of Sheila Pitt; and, from our frantic habits of consumerism, tongue-in-cheek commentary by John Langdon



Brenda Boyd, *Flag Waving*, silver gelatin print, 8 3/4" x 6", 2001.

and Timothy Blum. Other artists illustrate symbols of internal importance, such as Florence Allano McEwin, whose omninous birds loom large in her paintings, blocking out all rays of hope, revealing anxious icons as powerful as Poe's Raven. Claudia DeMonte's works, like *Female Fetish: Small Handbag* and *Female Fetish: Shoe*, sustain a lighter note, rendering status symbols as whimsical charms from pewter and wood.

The art historian E.H. Gombrich called iconography "the linguistics of the visual image," alluding to how we may "read" an artwork based on our visual vocabulary, much like the text