

# Sculpture obscured due to poor planning

By HENRY SUM

"Portrait Head: Elevation," by Nova Scotian sculptor Alan Barclay and his sculptor-wife Linda Holway, was erected this past July on the podium site between the Behavioural Sciences Building and the Farquharson Life Sciences Building. Financed by an insurance claim which covered the damages done to Barclay's earlier sculpture on the same site by vandals in 1983, one has to wonder if the artist deliberately creates work which incite vandalism.

As the situation stands, the work officially still belongs to the artist. Barclay has offered to donate it to the University as a gift, should it be accepted formally. The ambiguity of the work in its present location strongly suggests that this proposal be declined.

The piece is a formidable construction of galvanized sheet metal which, according to its sculptors, is an eight-foot elevation of a profile. As Holway explained it, "If you're overlooking the sculpture, you can see immediately what it is without any trouble at all."

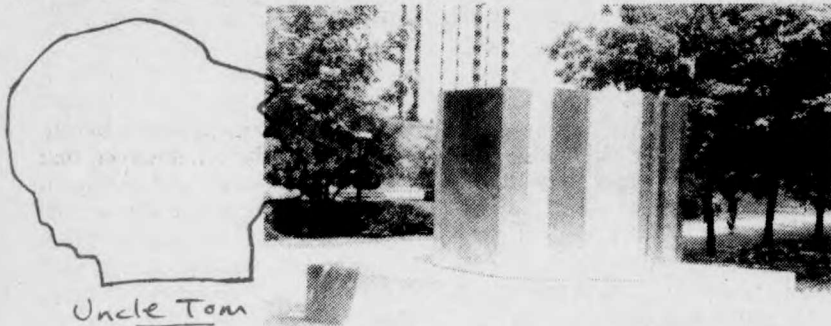
This, however, is the biggest problem with the sculpture; it can not be viewed properly from above as the nearest buildings offer no accessible vantage points. Consequently, the idea behind the work remains frustratingly obscure.

Despite the artist's claims that too

Despite the artist's visit to the grounds this past winter, he assumed that "it will be visible from adjacent buildings or upper floors as if the 'real' objective had been oriented towards the many who work in York's tower buildings." That Barclay had only a lame idea of the view from the neighboring buildings was self-evident when this writer and the artist made a routine inspection of the adjacent Behavioural Sciences Building's stairwell when the sculpture was near completion. To Barclay's surprise and subsequent enlightenment, the stairwell led to a walled dead-end. The only doorway leading to the false balustrade was locked and formally labeled off-limits to unauthorized personnel.

Witnessing the sculpture's installation, the joy and satisfaction Alan Barclay and Linda Holway had in the construction of their work was unmistakable. Barclay in particular took great relish in the drilling of holes and the fastening of two-by-fours. It was obvious that Barclay is an enthusiastic and capable craftsman.

But working under a false assumption and failing to examine the site for vantage points, the artist has most certainly miscalculating his audience. The students who traverse this route daily are not the sycophantic aesthetes to whom Barclay must be used to serving. Instead of refreshing and lightening the students'



The artist's subject and the eventual rendition.

much in our "instant society" is too "easily recognizable" and "requires little or no effort of perception," the Barclay sculpture offers too few clues as to its aim or purpose. The contours of the piece which are supposed to resemble the profile of a face laid on its side are much too subtle for an average viewer to decipher. The conceptual struggle to arrive at a mental image is further compounded by the fact that the profile is not only brutish and unattractive, but also happens to be the bland, anonymous silhouette of the uncle of one of the artists derived from some obscure family photo album. Rather than stimulate investigation, this clueless, unidentifiable block stymies even the most observant and cognitive among us.

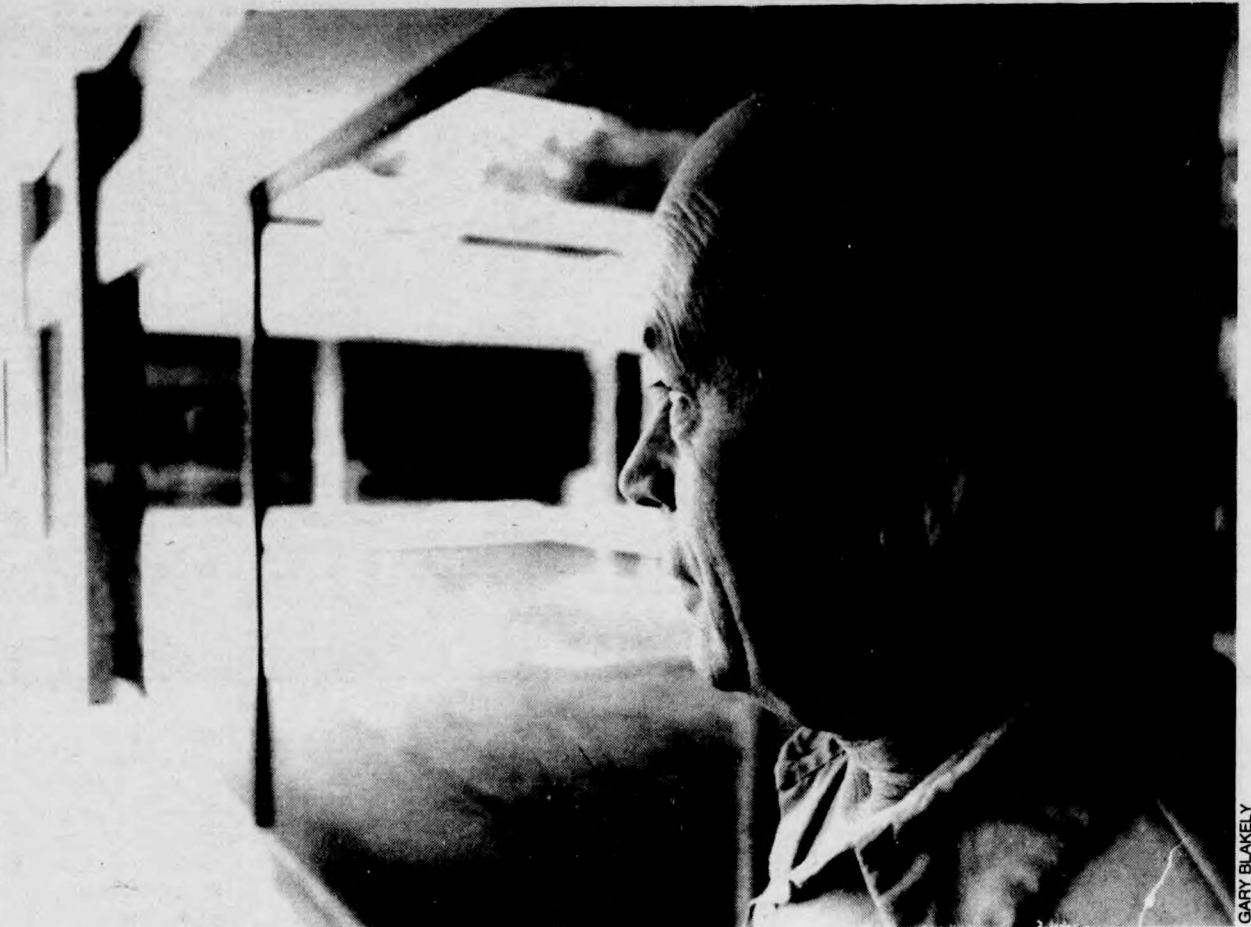
Apart from thwarting participation, it is difficult to imagine the work inviting any warmhearted familiarity. How is a student to react to a cold, monolithic obstacle that looks like an overgrown air-conditioning duct which clots the view of an otherwise pleasant, tree-filled passage en route to the Stedman Lecture Halls?

burden, this work will only perplex and irritate. A lighter, more lyrical monument is required here where the walls of the buildings tend to oppress the hurrying crowds.

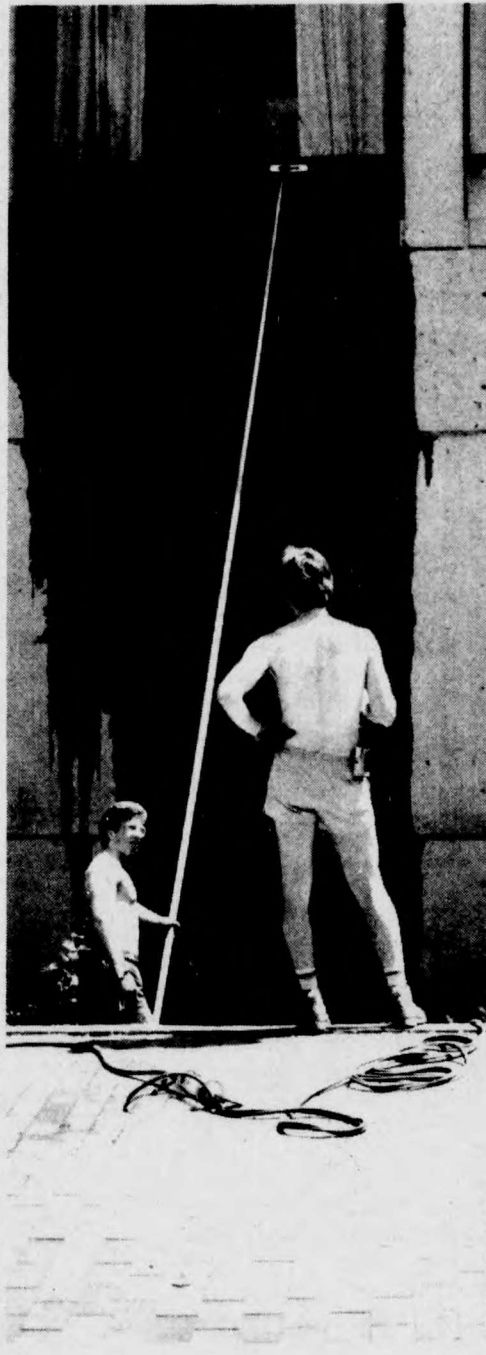
Perhaps Barclay should have taken the trouble to build the customary *maquette* of his proposal in the first place. Equally, the University's Curator and Fine Arts Dean should have given greater critical consideration to the work's overall concept and its potential for success on the present site.

Like Barclay's original vandalized work, "Profile Head: Elevation" was never commissioned for this location. In short, the new installation is simply a new creation out of Barclay's current repertoire.

Fortunately, no official agreement has been settled yet. Without going to the trouble of dismantling and re-erecting the sculpture in another location, the work still could be rescued from obscurity if at least it were presented with a title. This would deter viewers from mistaking the work for a disposal bin, and provide a much-needed clue as to its significance.



GARY BLAKELY



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Sights of summer: (Clockwise from top) Joe, a favorite member of York's cleaning staff, in a reflective moment; JSF's grinning Rayzel Robinson; the Calumet Astros, perennial first-placers in York's slo-pitch league; Yeomen hockey star Don McLaren (left) and colleague.



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