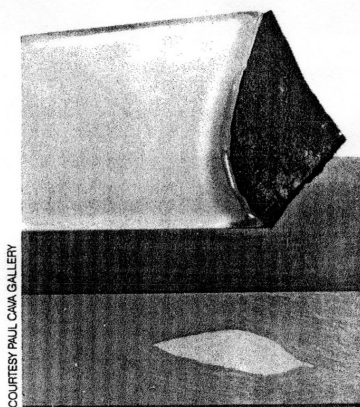


THE NATION



COURTESY PAUL CMA GALLERY

Bill Walton's *Iron Edge*, 1985, aluminum, glass, iron and paint, 8½ by 9½ inches, resonates "like Zen."

Philadelphia

BILL WALTON

Cava

WALTON'S great gift is in subverting the gritty, macho origins of scrap industrial materials he seeks out or stumbles upon by using them to create ironically elegant sculptures, often based on the concept of shelves. Not by force but by coaxing, Walton manipulates with precision joinery a chunk of iron, a bar of aluminum, a hunk of glass and a piece of wood into a seamless haiku of far more resonance than the small scale of his pieces would imply.

The highly disciplined stacking and fitting of three or four earth-bound elements (Walton calls them "base" materials) congeals into triads or tetrads of unusual grace. These pieces command attention, first with their impeccable structural harmony, and then through the arresting beauty of, say, the jagged edge of a velvety rusted iron remnant pressing into an icy lump of glass or a feathery grained piece of wood that has been deftly notched to accept a thin sheet of metal.

With a chemist's discernment and a watchmaker's skill in tinkering, Walton awakens unexpected allure in common materials that normally go unnoticed in our daily lives. A murky plate of industrial steel assumes mesmerizing powers after he gently wipes it with streaks of black enamel, confusing our reading of a reflective surface with one of unreachable depths. Glass enters and exits this body of work in guises ranging from imitation anthracite to clear sheets and actual "glasses"—tapered vessels.

When he adds paint to these simple sculptural equations, Walton skews their structural logic by slyly mimicking in flat, parallel strokes the gleam of polished aluminum or the density of dull steel. In these works from 1983-86 he periodically paints the image of a single leaf, always silhouetted and floating and sometimes sharply folded, perhaps to interject a life force into his theater of elementary elements. In *Iron Edge*, a slim leaf echoes the arrowhead shape of a chunk of iron above it, and the interrelations raise questions as to whether or not Walton subscribes to a hierarchical ranking of the stock materials within his stacked assemblages. While paint contributes the luxury of illusionism to these spare works, their unified swatches from the earth's crust resonate like Zen. Walton's voice, both anchored and poetic, is one to trust.

—Ann Jarmusch

DECEMBER 1986
ARTnews