Han Basket, 1985
Ed Rosbach's interest in baskets as a textile art began early in his career. With insatiable curiosity he has probed older civilizations to learn techniques and processes of making baskets and textiles. Through his exploration of rare weaves, netting, plaiting and dye processes he has emerged as a "harbinger of new departures and ideas." As Jack L. Larsen and Mildred Constantine state in The Art Fabric: Mainstream, "Through him the past has been inoculated into the unique area surrounding not only his former department and the University [UC Berkeley] but the entire Bay Area."

Rosbach was one of the first fiber artists to use plastic film (over rolled newspaper), plaiting and ikat dyeing techniques in contemporary terms. He has said that his reason for using newspaper, the dominant material in his structural and often minimal baskets, is primarily aesthetic. Any material can catch his eye—the jungle of colored wires in a telephone panel or a humble bit of colored foil. Rosbach makes no attempt to disguise the materials he uses. It would be a mistake, however, to read a social message into the media imagery, such as Mickey Mouse, John Travolta or Pete Rose, that appear on his baskets. For example, although he derived the image for Handgun from wall graffiti on the Berkeley campus, it can also be seen in terms of its resemblance to ancient oriental calligraphy. In fact, Rosbach lets his hand follow his curiosity and refers to his work as "rambling" (although he maintains a strong focus and consistency). His baskets fall into groups or series. His Han Basket from 1985 reflects experimentation with bright lacquer colors and traditional forms, while his latest basket, Patchwork of Newspaper and Pliable Wood, is devoid of added color. The ash splint structure is gone and the elements are now stapled together instead of woven. The effect, unlike the light but sturdy Han Basket, is ethereal. A gust of wind could carry it away.

Because of his influence on so many generations of young fiber artists in the United States, Rosbach has often been affectionately called the dean of contemporary American textiles, and is an honorary Fellow of the American Craft Council. Professor of Design at UC Berkeley from 1950-1979, Rosbach received his MFA in 1974 in weaving and ceramics from Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, during the period in which the Cranbrook philosophy was influenced strongly by the Bauhaus and the Wiener Werkstätte.

Rosbach's work has been shown widely in the United States and abroad. His pieces are owned by such institutions as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Renwick Gallery (Smithsonian Institution), Washington, DC; and The Art Institute of Chicago.

This exhibition is planned in conjunction with the National Conference of the American Craft Council at The Oakland Museum, June 4 through 7. The exhibition is funded in part by a donation from Miller/Brown Gallery, San Francisco.

Carole Austin

Works in MATRIX (all works lent by the artist unless otherwise noted):

1. Basket with Newspaper Handle, 1982, newspaper, rice paper, 7-1/2 x 7-1/2 x 7-1/2".

2. Pete Rose Basket with Twig Handle, 1982, newspaper, rice paper, twigs, 8-1/2 x 9 x 9".

3. Small Monument, 1983, plaited newspaper, rice paper, 9-1/2 x 7 x 6-1/2".

4. Lettuce Basket, 1984, plaited newspaper, spray lacquer, 6 x 8 x 8".


6. Han Basket, 1985 plaited ash splints, rice paper, lacquer, 11-1/2 x 8 x 8".

7. Purple Ash Splints with Newspaper and Cloth, 1985, ash splints, newspaper, cloth, 9 x 11-1/2 x 7-1/2".

8. Indonesian Shrine, 1985, plaited ash splints, heat transfer, 11 x 12-1/4 x 5-1/2".


10. Plaited Ash Splints with Newspaper Box, 1985-86, ash splints, newspaper, 7 x 9 x 6-1/2".

11. Plaited Ash Splint Box, 1985-86, ash splints, 7 x 7 x 4-1/2".

12. Patchwork of Newspaper and Pliable Wood, 1986, newspaper, pliable wood, staples, 8-1/4 x 12 x 9".

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Museum of Contemporary Crafts, NY; Nordness Gallery, NY; Museum West, S.F.; Oakland Art Gallery, Oakland, CA; Ohio State Univ., Columbus; Henry Art Gallery, Univ. of Washington, Seattle; Fiberworks Gallery, Berkeley, CA; Univ. of Florida, Gainesville; UC Santa Cruz.
Selected group exhibitions and bibliography about the artist:


Selected bibliography by the artist:

Baskets as Textile Art

The New Basketry

The Art of Paisley

The Nature of Basketry
(West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1986).

MATRIX is supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency, Mrs. Paul L. Wattis, the T. B. Walker Foundation, and the Alameda County Art Commission's County Supervisors' Art Support Program.