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The New York Times

Art in Review; Al Hansen

By Ken Johnson

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Andrea Rosen 525 West 24th Street, Chelsea Through April 29

The sexy girl popped up everywhere in the 1960's. She appeared as Tom Wesselmann's "Great American Nude" series, Andy Warhol's Marilyns, Michael Snow's Walking Woman, Mel Ramos's soft-core pinups and Roy Lichtenstein's love-sick comic book heroines. As a voluptuous silhouette called Venus, she animated the collages of Al Hansen (1927-1995), surveyed in this compact retrospective.

Hansen was an early Happening artist, but he is best remembered for collages using chocolate candy bar wrappers. Noticing that the word Hershey contained two feminine pronouns, Hansen began in the early 60's cutting out and pasting up the wrappers' silver-on-brown letters into densely patterned collages shaped like curvy female torsos. He created all-over fields of typography on wood panels as well, but the female silhouettes, tattooed with words like "Her," "She," "Hey," "Yes" and other permutations of the letters from the wrapper, remain his most exciting works. With delightful exuberance, they reflect the erotic extroversion and vulgar commercialism of the decade of the sexual revolution.

Hansen also constructed totem-like, faux-primitive sculptures of female torsos by gluing together hundreds of filtered cigarettes butts or wooden matches. And he made sculptures of miniature towers and of an ocean wave out of matchsticks. These sculptures call to mind that species of folk art known as Tramp Art. Hansen was an urbane descendant of Kurt Schwitters and a clever Pop artist, but there is also an outsider aspect to his work. It could be mistaken for the art of an ingenious, slightly crazy street person.