

Danieli, Fidel, "John White on Golf," Volume 6, No. 36, Artweek, (October 25, 1975) p. 5, illus.

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John White's Mt. St. Mary's College Gallery show, *Sandtraps*, is the first of a series of exhibits based on his experiences at various golf courses. White was an active sportsman well before he became an artist, achieving the level of semi-pro in golf, as well as being skilled in tennis, ice skating, skiing and baseball. For years as an art student he carefully avoided the "jock" image and "hid his trophies." More recently, seeking a recreational outlet, he returned to golf and last year produced a series of drawings based on the personal relationships and activities of the golfers he knows from small Santa Monica course.

Working out a clearly formulated concept, a week before this exhibit, a series of photographs was recorded as White played a round at Knollwood course, documenting in long range views and in textural detail the sand hazards encountered on route. Two sets of nine pairs of photos flank the walls of the second room of the show. They are preceded by four mixed media drawings describing the actions and perceptions of a golfer and the choreography of the hit ball. These drawings reflect a shift in style for White – more detailed and precise, multilayered and dense, but also more informational and specific. He sees them as a refinement, as more complex and more notational than before, yet still fusing esthetics and informational data. As is usual in White's graphics, the drawings combine views in clearly indicating a plunge into one-point perspective and a tunnel of concentrated vision crossed with the effect of a down shot that vaguely resembles the cross section of a diagrammed volcano. White likes this device for the amount of energy and tension it creates. The works are zoned into horizontal registers with a symmetry that furnishes an ambiguous spatial counter. The divisions provide areas for a display of various drawing techniques and media, from pencil to felt-tip colored pens, and from etchinglike crosshatch to random marks and shading. Whereas White's previous drawings operated on a more colorful and larger scale, these seem extremely controlled, monochromatic and require close focus study.

Another pair of graphic presentations of a sort not previously seen incorporate paint, stick-on symbols and masking tape on glass panels. The two glass pieces were created as white constructed a sand pile – a combined replication of details from the photos of the sand traps – in the main room. He describes the glass as an "intellectual" surface and used it "despite" its

current popularity risking a set of cliché associations. Feedback from the activity of forming the pile clarifies marks related to the diagrams in the four drawings on paper.

The yard of sand resembles a sampler of gestures, accidents and activities as it includes raking marks, painted rocks, toned-in footprints, movement tracks, resting golf balls and even a golf club buried in an upright position. The pile as a sculptural form appears regularly in White's body of work, as early as a Newspaper Pile of a 1969-70 performance piece and as recently as a Psychotherapy Pile of wood chips done last year in Chicago.

Initially the most confusing, and ultimately the most fascinating, objects in the show are nine competition pairing charts. Sixteen pairs of words are listed in the positions of players, and eight emerge victorious to "play" in the next round, and so forth, until one wins the tournament. Actual golf tournament sheets are used, complete in their authenticity to their border of bright red Ben Hogan ad lettering. White produced the lists of thirty-two words for each sheet from visual and mental images experienced in each of the nine sand traps. Later he subjectively tested each pair, and the strongest of the two was carried over to the following match or bracket. He terms it a tournament of words in the form of concrete poetry. Hopefully, White might reproduce them in printed form so they could reach a wider audience. Language is also worked into the sand pile in a literal, labeling way, with the lettering of the nine winning words being located on glass panels stuck into the pile as identification of the incidents reproduced.

The presentation of the thinking and visual images of the artist as a concentrating and performing golfer is the crux of this exhibit. The challenge was to investigate "the risk of bringing in somewhat distant relationships (maybe even nonrelational types of things) and get them into the 'art' situation," to cause viewers to move between a direct experience and an esthetic one. In dealing with all three issues, I believe his solutions are brilliant ones.

This review is based on two interviews with the artist – one on June 9, 1974, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for Junior College Teachers, and another on October 8, 1975.