

PHOTOS BY CATHIE COWARD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Artist Karen Trask says that she has always tried to work in the lightest of materials. This wood carving is called *One Day at a Time*.

Artists turn over a new page

Marianne Reim — Steel Notes; and **Karen Trask** — Touch Wood.
AIC Gallery, Burlington Art Centre, 1333 Lakeshore Rd., Burlington, 905-632-7796
Curated by: Dawn White Beatty, continues to June 23.

By **ELAINE HUJER**
 Special to The Hamilton Spectator

Turning over a new leaf — whether of paper, metal or wood — is just one of the themes of a dual exhibition currently on view in the AIC Gallery of the Burlington Art Centre.

The show features the work of Montreal artist Karen Trask and Grimsby's Marianne Reim and focuses on the intertwining roles of the sculptural object and the written text. Book-works in a variety of media are pre-eminent, but while bibliophilia may be the thread that binds the show together, the work of the two artists couldn't be more different.

Karen Trask, for instance, says that she has always tried to work in the lightest of materials. The artist, who lost her mother when she was six years old, equates lightness and whiteness with a personal expression of her mother's absence. An earlier work, for instance, is a video called *The Mother Text*. Started as a letter written to her dead mother, Trask reproduced the letter on floating sheets of paper then videotaped the action, slowing it down to create a graceful, ethereal dance; a sort of paean to "the unbearable lightness of being" which she terms "a presence/absence — the presence of nothing."

Trask has continued to write, both stories and poetry, and this show represents eight years of literary output, book-work and bookmaking, which has been a parallel production with her sculpture, installation art and video. An assortment of her books lie on a table and gloves are provided so that viewers can open and examine the drawings and read the stories.

Trask has made her own little handloom out of pins and styrofoam and weaves and spins her own paper. The texts are written in simple, yet elegant calligraphy and often include tiny, superimposed sculptures and prints to enliven the narratives.

One of the most beautiful objects made by Trask is a pale, translucent sculpture of a stack of books. Made from hand-made paper woven from cotton pulp, the books are lit from behind and glow with an unearthly light. The inspiration for the sculpture is simple: a pile of books on her window sill with sunlight shining on them. The end result is a sculpture which gives new meaning to the phrase "illuminated manuscript." Other free-standing artworks relate to the role of the elm tree both as a source of paper products and as a local historical marker. And in a nod to the new media, Trask has also designed a virtual book with an audio component on a computer where viewers can move a mouse about, manipulating letters and phrases that relate to trees.

Like Trask, Marianne Reim's work is text-related, but her books are made of steel and so, have a weight and physicality that give them a strongly commemorative quality. The artist is a graduate of McMaster's art and art history program and says that she started out painting, then turned to fibreglass and plaster sculpture. Then one day she saw some rusted steel.

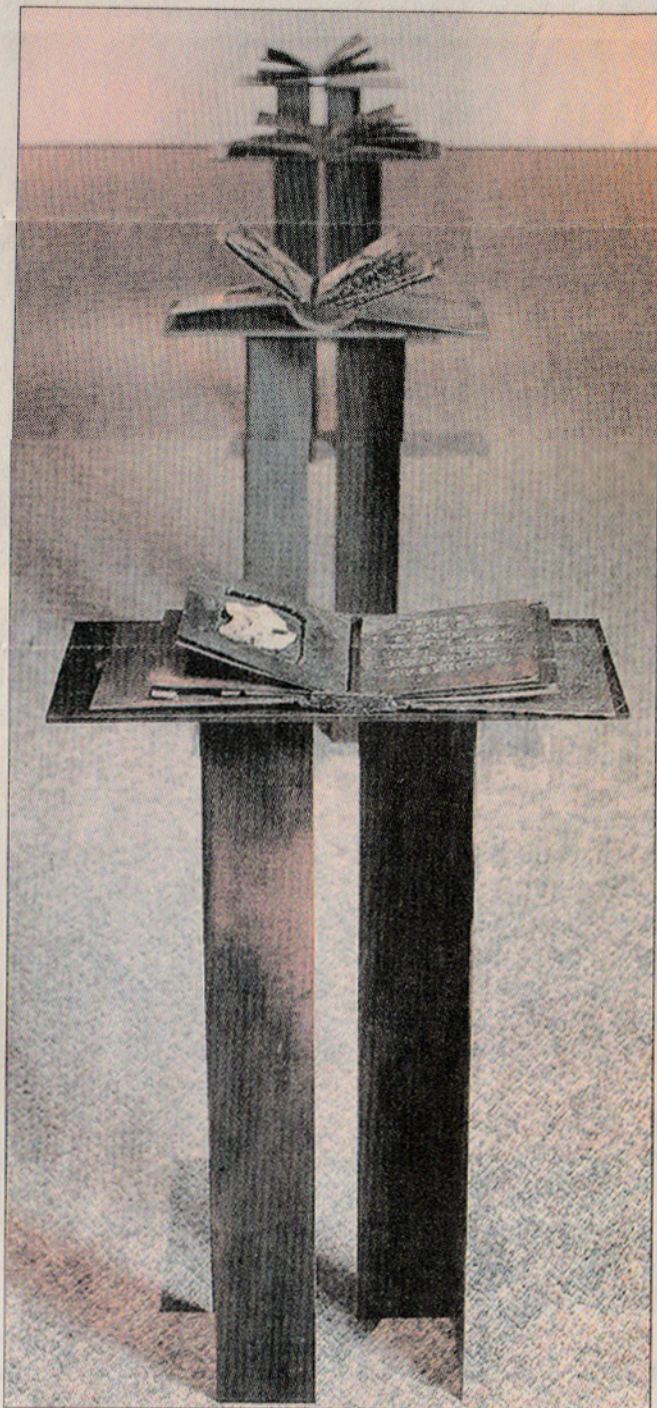
She says, "I was blown away. I went to Mohawk College and learned how to weld. I just love steel, it's heavy to move around but you can do so much with it."

Reim's large steel books have been welded and cut to make volumes that can be touched and opened, with separate pages that can be turned. One series is inscribed with the Lord's Prayer, one example in Reim's native German, another in Japanese and another in Assyrian Aramaic, which is the language that Christ would have used to say the prayer. Another prayer on a freestanding sculpture is written in Ascii characters, the computer language. Reim says that she is not particularly religious, but she remembers as a Catholic child, being impressed by the teaching that repetition of the Lord's Prayer would release those in Purgatory for the journey to heaven.

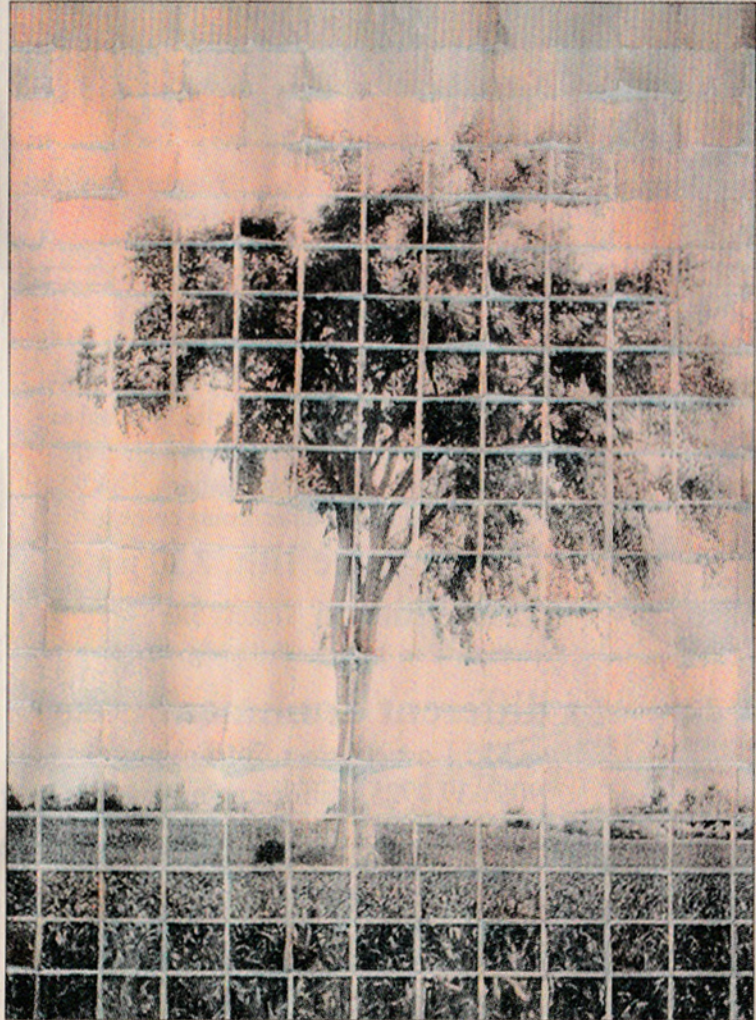
The most moving works are, perhaps, two steel texts that relate to a personal tragedy. The artist's husband died of cancer six years ago and Reim has created a volume with jagged tears and ruptures in the rough-cut pages, a sort of diary that tracks her husband's final illness; an accompanying text speaks of life and charts the ultrasounds of her grandchild's heartbeats.

Reim often relies on traditional Christian iconography, but gives it a personal twist. An installation piece called *Calvary* features a huge steel crucifix, sprouting from stone and gravel and adorned with female breasts, one of several pieces that deal with women's suffering. The metal spikes, the twisted, rusted steel and the dark, sombre colours give Reim's work a medieval Gothic quality very closely related to German expressionist art.

In a sense, both artists are dealing with loss: Trask taking a transcendental approach, as if her artistic vision has scanned not only the palpable contents of a scene but has taken into account the intangible intervals between moments of perception; Reim transforming crude metal into powerful and dramatic icons of heart-rending potency.



Marianne Reim's work, above and left, is created from steel. Her large steel books have been welded and cut so each page can be turned over and read.



Some of Karen Trask's work relates to the role of trees, both as a source of paper products and as a local historical marker.