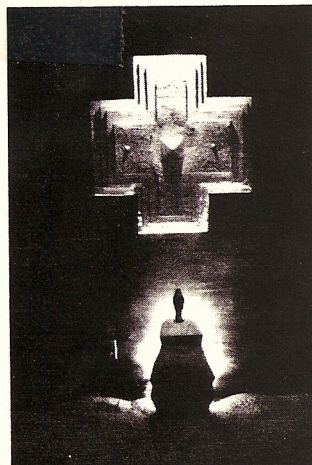


## SPRINGTIME ON THE FRINGE

DAN CAMERON

Spring 1985 provided a regional survey of art from the Southeast to the East Village.

The keynote to this exhibition seems to have been *Obsession*, and no artist worked the terrain more effectively than Jerry Beck, from Boston. Chosen by Kathy Halbreich at MIT, Beck is something of an organizer himself, having founded the Basement Gallery in 1983 and the Revolving Museum a year later. He is known for his inventive semi-guerilla installations and site-specific group shows in abandoned trains and storefronts. *Crossroads*, Beck's Artists Space installation, is heralded from the main floor by a cluster of national flags, each design containing a cross. By the time one descends to the basement, it is clear what place the motif will have. A fictive home, containing a living room, bedroom, bath, kitchen, hall, stairway and closet, has been built out of, and made to resemble, crosses. Omnipresent and insistent, the cross functions occasionally as a symbol of order and renewal; it is manipulated by Beck as a fetish, to suggest decay, violence, fetishism, and death. Even the books in the Frank Lloyd Wright library have cross-referenced titles (ouch). *Bird of Destruction* is a vertical Maltese cross imbedded with tiny warheads, launch buttons, gauges and propellers. Never is it explicitly portrayed as a crucifix, yet creeping up on the viewer's instincts for fear and nervousness—I saw a group of tourists searching earnestly for the stairs—Beck's vision is both apocalyptic and mock-reverent; but it is also pervasive. Like the wide-eyed apostle of a Masonic cult, Beck made me sense a subliminal voodoo reverberating through the entire fabric of America's manmade landscape.



Jerry Beck, *Cryptic Cross*, 1985.  
Mixed media, 74 x 34 x 14".

Installation view. Courtesy Artists Space.