

# Collages explore nature of relationships

By Christopher A. Yates

FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

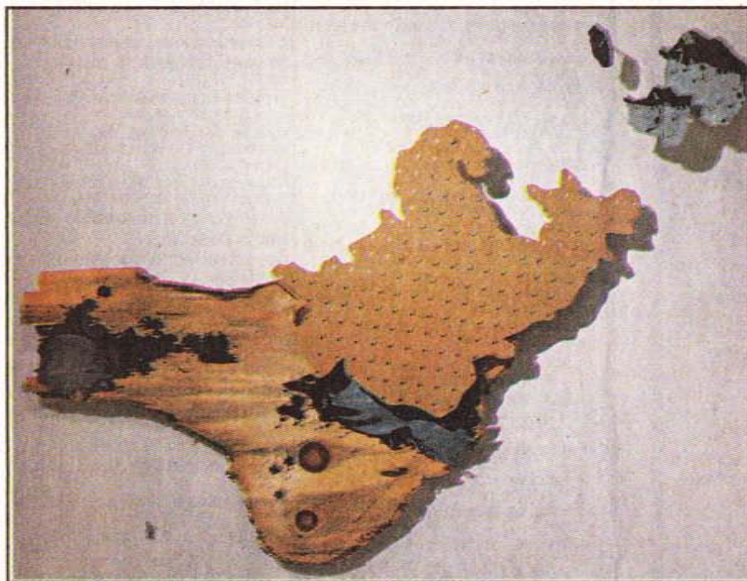
In "Remote Sensing" at the Ohio Art League gallery, Nicole Gibbs uses collage to investigate barriers and boundaries.

Mixing fragile and transitory materials with those that are stable and permanent, her work speaks to the complex relationships we have with one another and, in a larger sense, with nature itself. Abstract and fluid, each composition offers a visual cat and mouse in which some elements are obscured and others revealed.

Gibbs' mother worked for the U.S. Geological Survey, and young Nicole became intrigued by satellite photographs. Much of her work has a maplike feel.

For the diptych *Boundary*, Gibbs layered many materials — including Mylar, India ink and newsprint. In the center of the piece, a fragile blue slip — typically used to decorate ceramics — was used to paint paper. It seems in danger of flaking off at any moment and signals impermanence. Four yellow circles frame the scene.

In hindsight, Gibbs discovered that the image she created bore a



*Glacier* by Nicole Gibbs

striking resemblance to the satellite photos of oil fires in Kuwait she had seen 18 years earlier.

Chance and collaboration also inform her work.

In *Spill Map*, she transforms the dropcloth from another project into a new piece. Each spill is articulated with acrylic paint, suggesting strange islands and biological structures.

*Glacier* refers to both rigid impasses and thawing. Consisting of three staggered layers, the piece moves from a thin slice of a tree trunk to an islandlike piece of pegboard, then to a film of dried blue-gray ceramic slip. Each material has inherent properties of strength and weakness, suggesting that at each stage of a relationship are dangers.

► "Remote Sensing: Works by Nicole Gibbs" continues through Jan. 27 in the Ohio Art League gallery, 1552 N. High St. Hours: noon to 8 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. Call 614-299-8225 or visit [www.oal.org](http://www.oal.org).

Concealed behind translucent Mylar, *Target Bloom* and *Red Sun I* are meant to be viewed from both the front and the back. Each side offers a different perspective and understanding. The abstract imagery — bits of paper, splashes of ink and cutout shapes — moves from clarity to obscurity, depending upon where the viewer stands.

A tangible barrier between individuals, the pieces resonate with our inability to truly understand what others see.

In the 3-D pieces *Hoop Jumper* and *Of the Same Feather*, two figurative objects placed side by side seem to size each other up. Constructed of organza fabric, they shimmer and seem ready to perform when directed or confronted.

Gibbs' work is effective and evocative. Although she builds each piece from personal experience, her ideas strike a universal chord.