SOIL AT THE ART GALLERY, AGAIN

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In his paper, "The image of soil in landscape art, old and new" (see Soil Survey Horizons, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 19) Hans Jenny tells of an art exhibit in Germany in which soil monoliths were interspersed among the modern art works. Recently I came upon a soil exhibit in a local art gallery and could hardly believe my eyes. The exhibit was flat on the floor rather than on the wall. It was by Jim Finnegan, an art student.

The accompanying figure represents this untitled work (price $325), which I saw at the 42nd University of Wisconsin Student Art Exhibit on April 12, 1970. The exhibit consisted of a tray of soil about 3 inches deep, 15 inches wide and 30 inches long. A 2" x 4" board stuck up about 3 feet into the air near one end. Ramps were joined to the tray on all four sides, and consisted of immitation red brick panels such as are on display at building material supply houses.

The soil appeared to be a silty clay loam to clay loam, puddled and fragmented into sub-rounded clods ranging in diameter from one to six centimeters. I would guess that the soil came from the B2-IIC horizon of a somewhat poorly drained soil developed in a thin (75 cm.) loess covering over glacial till. There were a few pebbles in the soil bed. Not a single natural ped was to be seen.

This piece of "art" was one of about 50 pieces in a whole menagerie of "works", one of which was a white, hollow fiberglass full-size graceful but crude replica of a human body, strung up as at a gallows. The juxtaposition of the pseudo-cadaver and the tray of soil seem a propos, because my reaction to the soil exhibit is that it was a memorial to soil, mangled victim of man's aggression. It shows soil in a puddled, fragmented state, shafted and oppressed on all sides.