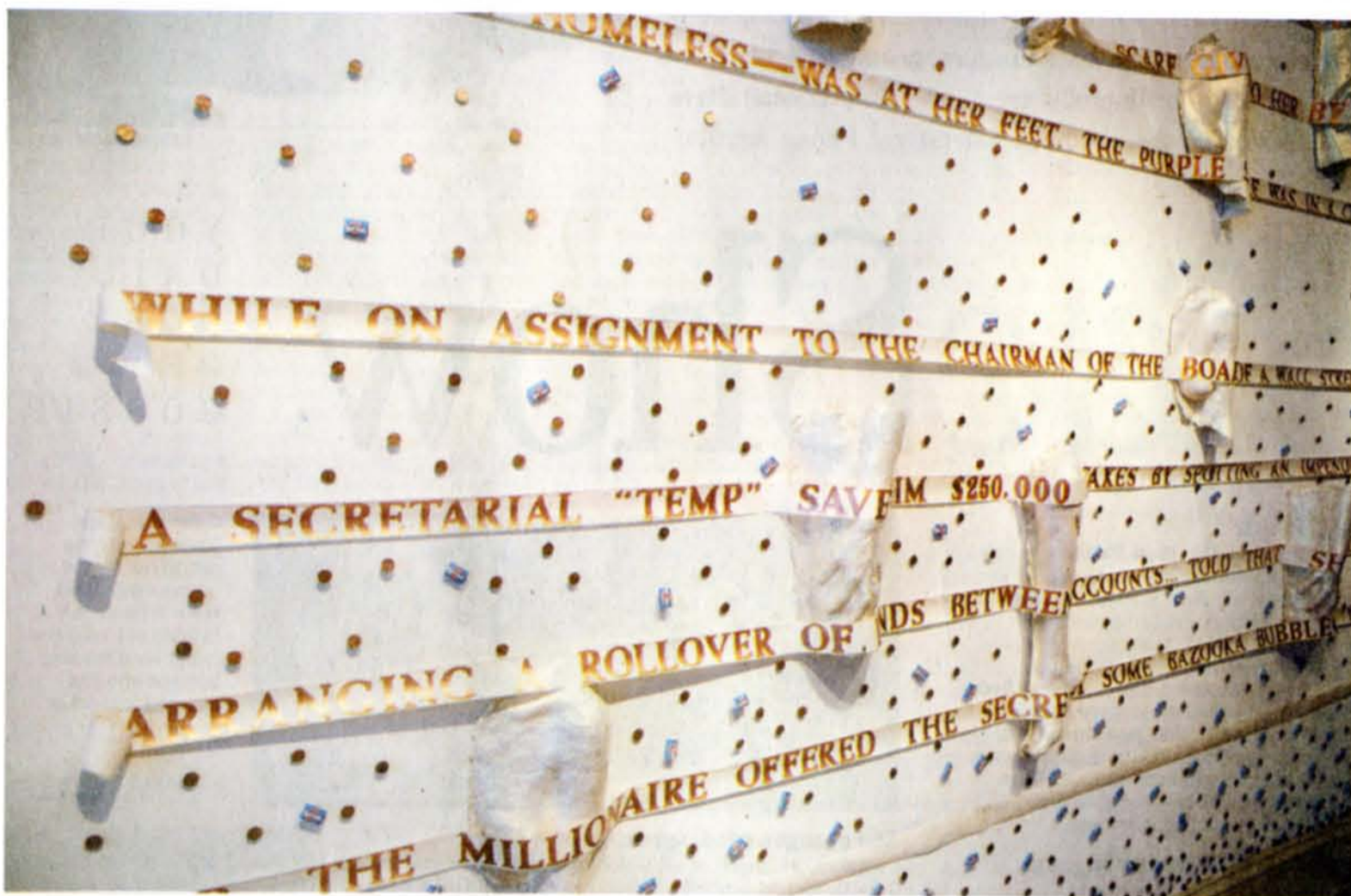


# WalltoWall

A financial refugee's art makes the point that from the scandals of the '80s to the scandals of today, little has changed on the Street.



"Pennies From Heaven" commemorates the time the artist saved her Wall Street firm \$250,000 and was rewarded with gum. Courtesy TandM Arts



Virginia Maksymowicz, artist, ex-Wall Street temp: "Isn't it amazing? This work of 30 years ago, and essentially nothing has changed."

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By Stephan Salisbury  
INQUIRER CULTURE WRITER

**N**ot so long ago, in a galaxy not very far, far away, there existed a breed apart — feral, solipsistic, arrogant, and rich as Croesus. Masters of the Universe, they dubbed themselves, and they ruled Wall Street in the 1980s, buying and selling and liquidating faster than you can say slick.

But it all came down, first with the stock market crash of 1987, then with a skein of criminal charges.

Yes, Wall Street was at the heart of shenanigans in the 1980s, just it is in the 21st century.

Watching it all back then was artist Virginia Maksymowicz, who labored several years as a secretarial temp for some of the Street's most infamous names, notably those at now-defunct Drexel Burnham Lambert, the epicenter of junk bonds ruled by the likes of convicted felon Michael Milken and Jeff Beck, known as "Mad Dog."

Maksymowicz used her experience. See **ART** on C4



"Bottom Line" from "Previously Occupied: Wall Street Works 1984-1988."

## Wall St. refugee's art is an acid look at her old world

**ART** from C1

es to fashion a series of installations about Wall Street, poverty, greed, power, and violence. And now, along with her husband and artistic sidekick, Blaise Tobia, she has brought back those works of a quarter-century ago for a show at Art on the Avenue Gallery, 3808 Lancaster Ave.

"Previously Occupied: Wall Street Works 1984-1988," which opens Friday and runs through Nov. 26, fuses art and politics, past and present, and seals it all with a kiss of sorts for Wall Street.

"Isn't it amazing?" said Maksymowicz, now 59 and an associate professor of art at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster. "This work of 30 years ago, and essentially nothing has changed. There's been a slight shift, in terms of Wall Street. Stuff has moved from the mergers and acquisitions end to the banking end. But it's all relevant, 30 years later."

Actually, Maksymowicz was in it

back then for the money. Working as a temp on Wall Street paid very well. And her mother had insisted she learn a marketable skill in high school, just in case.

When Milken was pushing junk-bond deals, Maksymowicz occasionally worked for him.

She did time at Kidder Peabody, Standard & Poor's, Goldman Sachs. Once she found a mistake in a tax return that saved her firm \$250,000. Her boss rewarded her with a "good job" and two pieces of bubble gum.

That became the basis of her installation *Pennies From Heaven*, which features a wall of cast-paper arms and legs, and pennies and little Bazooka boxes raining down.

Oversize text tells Maksymowicz's own story, intertwined with another, "about a homeless woman who squatted in Grand Central Station and was found dead one day, and near her was found this purple scarf that an aid-for-the-homeless group had given to her," said Tobia,

a photographer and professor of art and art history at Drexel University.

It was at Drexel Burnham Lambert that Maksymowicz had many of what might be called her signature experiences.

She worked there on and off for about two years, her most memorable encounters coming at the hands of Beck, an aggressive wheeler-dealer who literally made it up as he went along. He was known as "Mad Dog" and so captivated Oliver Stone that the director of *Wall Street* used him as a consultant on the movie.

"I was one of the only temps who could stand working for Beck," who died of a heart attack in 1995 at 48. "It was me and another temp who was an ex-nun," she recalled.

"He drove all the other temps away because the guy was either manic or he was on coke. He would have these incredible fits, throw things around the office, and scream and howl, and once when I

was working for him there was an auto workers demonstration outside because Drexel Burnham had orchestrated some merger and in the merger pension funds were [obliterated]. ... Beck opens the window and spits on the protestors."

Stone brought Beck aboard the movie to "spiff up the language," Maksymowicz remembered.

"Stone would fax over some part of the dialogue, and Beck would call me into his office, and he would dictate to me. This is what was so weird. I'm sitting there, you know, the dutiful secretary in my polyester suit, and I'm writing down, 'Rip his ... throat out and stuff it in your garbage compactor!' I'd have to type it up and fax it back to Stone and then call Stone up and ask him if it was obscene enough."

Generally it was.

Martin Sheen was also in the movie, and Maksymowicz was arrested with him at an antinuclear protest.

"So life was getting very confused at that point as to whether I was an artist, a secretary, what was real life, what was the movies," she said. "Was Sheen an actor or a fellow activist who I was getting arrested with and going to court with?"

The Beck material is memorialized in an installation called *Excess Assets*, a row of cast-paper buttocks with scenes from the life of Drexel Burnham painted on them (including a portrait of Mad Dog himself).

Maksymowicz and Tobia believe the whole of this work is directly relevant to the Occupy Wall Street movement and want to use the Art on the Avenue show as a fund-raiser for Occupy Philly.

"You know," Maksymowicz said, "this work is relevant."

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