

he decided to close up shop and move to Incline Village, Nevada, with his wife Nan and daughter Maria.

He wanted something more of life: To express his philosophies and the truths he saw. "My vision," he explains, "grew out of the realization of a need for personal freedom — from the constraints of rationality, from self-importance, from doubts and inhibitions and limitations. Art is a means of empowerment toward this freedom."

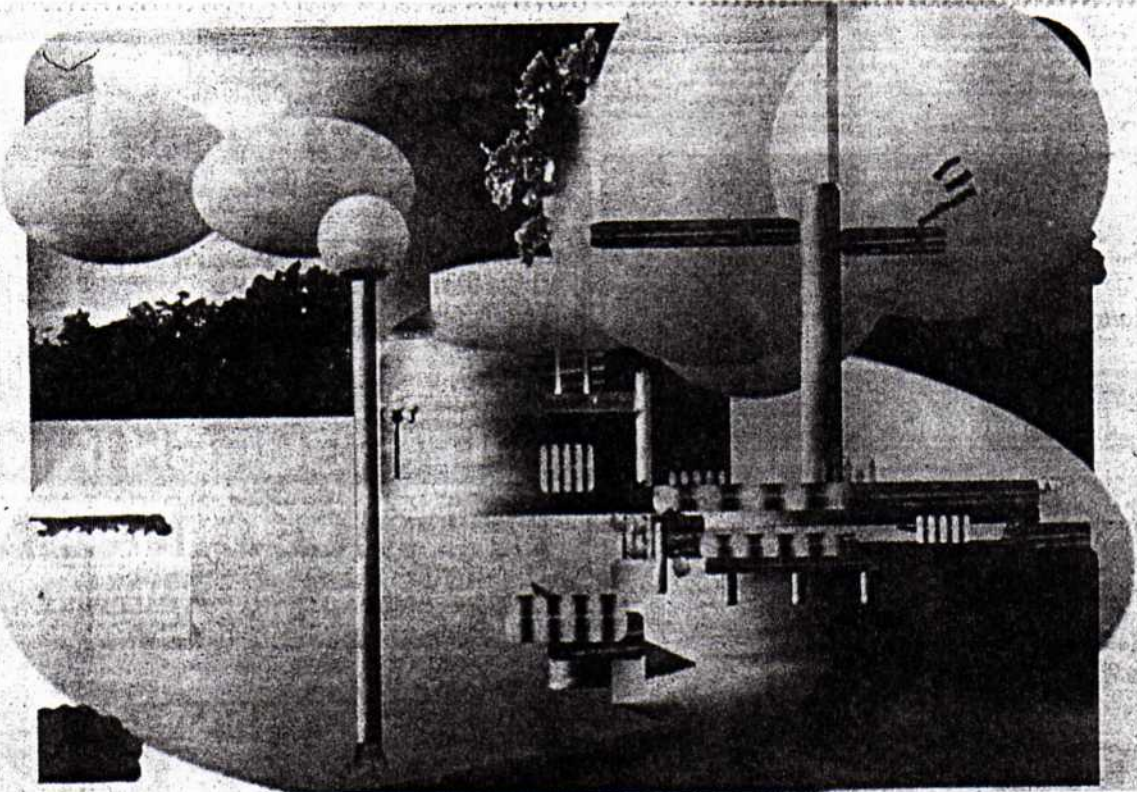
**W**HAT BARTA HAS DONE WITH THAT freedom is free his viewers from the constraints of their own senses. He believes that "we have vastly more capacity than we use," and he finds pleasure and purpose in revealing that belief through his art. Barta explains that his work "reconstructs visual language using the computer to manipulate the elements of a setting." In other words, he uses one photograph of one scene and rearranges the pieces, using all these elements as abstract structures. In that way, these elements, when abstracted, become metaphors for the original realistic scene.


In manipulating his creations, Barta spends the great majority of his time planning the result. He'll start with a rather unexceptional photograph — perhaps of a scene with a tree, a barn, or a car. He then rearranges the elements into a clever composition that makes all the individual pieces of the scene abstract yet recognizable. His instinctive use of positive and negative space, and the intricate way he reconstructs the scene, contribute to results that are highly interesting and entertaining.

In the end, Barta says, "It becomes apparent that the fixed meaning of things is arbitrary — that things, through the structure of their expression, are carriers of a more fundamental message: That all things are metaphors for the expression of abstract intent."

"The world expresses itself metaphorically," he continues. "We see, we interpret, we understand through metaphor. It is our common language with the world — our access to the universal."

**LES BARTA'S COMPUTER PHOTO CONSTRUCTIONS** will be on display at Mercyhurst College's Cummings Gallery, on the second floor of the Hammermill Library, through Feb. 10. Gallery hours are Mon-Thurs 9 a.m.-11 p.m.; Fri and Sat 9-4; Sun 1-11 p.m. For details, call 824-2000.



 The Arts

# ACCESS TO THE UNIVERSAL

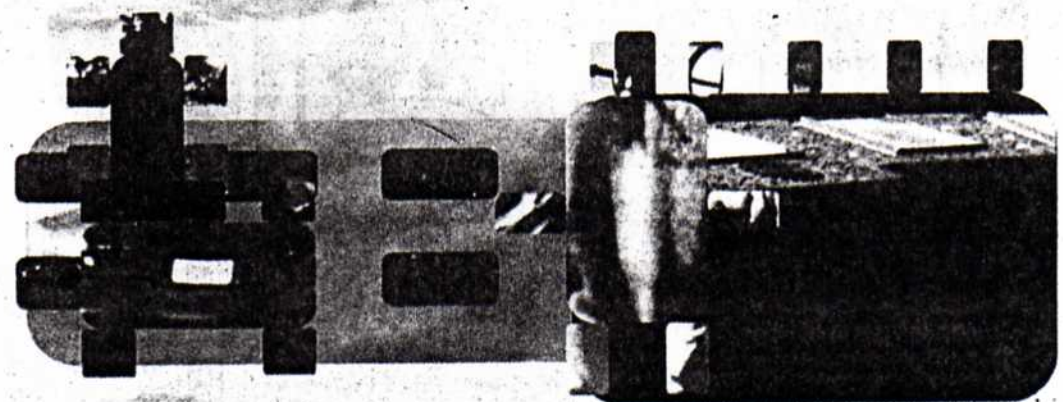
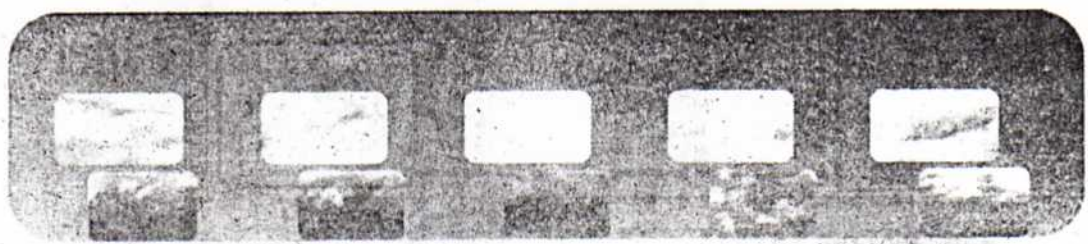
*Les Barta's computerized photo collages show how 'things' are merely carriers of a more fundamental message. 'The world expresses itself metaphorically,' he says.*

**BY KAREN RENE MERKLE**  
**A**rtists are those special people who not only have a unique way of looking at things, but who also possess the insight and skills to translate their visions of reality into entirely new constructions. They create their own worlds, and let us all in for a visit.

With no artist is that more true than Nevada's Les Barta. His computerized photo collages take common images and reconfigure them into faint suggestions of their former reality. For reality, says Barta, "is a means to an end. It is not important what we see, but how we use it." You'll be able to use Barta's creations for your own means now that an exhibit of his works has opened at Mercyhurst College's Cummings Gallery. They'll be on display through February 10.

If the name sounds familiar, you may have been exposed to Barta's work at the 1994 Jamestown Community College Photonominal exhibit, or at a show at the Chautauqua Art Association Galleries in 1993. Barta has also displayed his art in one-person, group, and juried exhibits from coast to coast, in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, New York, Ohio, Texas, Utah, Washington, and in the nation's capital.

At least part of Barta's unusual, outsider's view of the world may stem from his own childhood. Born in Hungary, he received a very definite culture shock when he immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1950. A self-taught artist, Barta was also a small businessman who owned a tanning business when, in 1987,



'Nut Forest' (shown top of page) and 'Lakes' (above). Both 16-by-20-inch computer photo constructions by Les Barta. SHOWCASE, Thursday, January 18, 1996 — 13-S