

# 'It's All About Things'

## exhibit puts fresh spin on the value of art

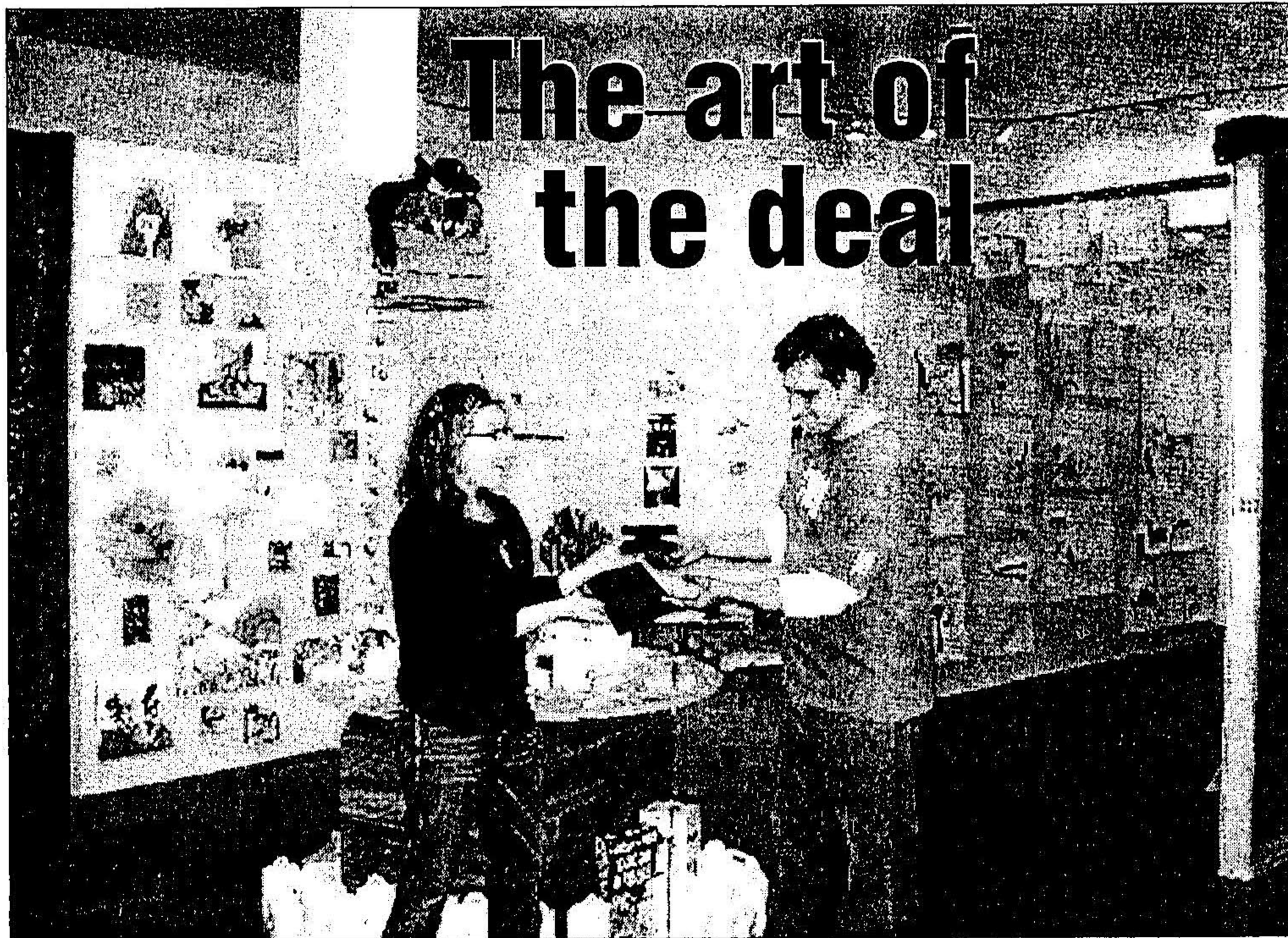
By JENIFER VOGT

"I'm waiting to decide if I want to accept them," said Luis Maldonado motioning to a platform on the floor topped with a small group of items left by people who are hoping that he will accept them in exchange for a piece of his art work. On the platform, which he referred to as the "bidding table," lay a dusty, old photo album, bursting with — not photos — but business cards collected over the years, about eight per page. There was also a coffee table book of photography, a few small figurines, a charcoal drawing, and varied bric-a-brac.

Maldonado, an M.F.A. student at Purchase College, isn't judging these items according to their price, or even their aesthetic value, but he is definitely sizing them up. After all, whatever he chooses to accept will become a permanent part of "It's All About Things," a multimedia exhibition he has mounted as his senior project in the Richard and Dolly Maass Gallery at Purchase College. For this reason, Maldonado needs some time to mull over their significance for him and for the person that has left them there. His decisions to exchange, for the most part, have been based more on emotion than his aesthetic evaluation because, by bartering, Maldonado, 30, wants to illustrate that art can be accessible to all and make a statement on the attitude of exclusivity and status that dominates the art market — the market that determines what is considered "high," or good, art and what is not.

The items that Maldonado has accepted are as diverse as they are original, and leave the visitor curious about their origin. Maldonado pointed out, "For some reason many people bring in things that are very personal." This is evident in a collection of stories written by a woman about her past lovers and a 1970s army hospital "Request for Sterilization" (a vasectomy). Not as evident, however, in a Sponge Bob water gun toy or comic books. But, whatever the sentiment, or lack thereof, one thing remains — a fingerprint of this person is now a permanent part of Maldonado's installation.

One of the first things the visitor realizes when entering this show is that this is not a typical gallery experience, Maldonado, who has a calm, slow and easy manner, greets everyone, microphone in hand as though he were standing in the middle of a sales showroom, and points out different areas of interest. The experience is similar to visiting a trade show where you are greeted at the entrance and then told where to go and what to see. In fact, Maldonado leaves photocopied maps in his waiting area, which is a good



Above: Graduate art and design student Sasha Kopelowitz, a Scarsdale native and 1992 SHS graduate, barters with Luis Maldonado. Right: Maldonado has created a hybrid of museum and gallery with the appeal of the flea market.

# The art of the deal



By introducing the barter, it is the experience of viewing and buying art that Maldonado has turned upside down.

thing because, using architecture as sculpture, he has created several smaller rooms and stalls within the larger gallery space. Even with the map and Maldonado's accompanying tour, it's difficult to remember what is what. Maldonado asked this reporter to think of it like a department store, "sort of like IKEA, you know?"

Even less typical than the way Maldonado has transformed the white box gallery space is that the average Joe or

Jane has the opportunity to become a collector. The veil of mystique surrounding the gallery transaction is lifted here. The visitor walks away with a piece of the exhibition and leaves something of himself

with the artist.

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