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the reel deal:
My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding

by Jeremiah Friedman
Film Reviewer

Perhaps, the best proof of the mediocrity of contemporary Hollywood features, is the unexpected commercial success of "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding," which reached number two at the box office last weekend, despite first hitting theaters last April. I say commercial success, for although audiences have embraced this sweet romantic comedy, the response of most critics has been luke-warm.

In case you haven't read one of the many, gushing chronicles of its unlikely rise from obscurity to Hollywood legend, the plot centers on Fotoula Portokalos' (Nia Vardalos) efforts to reconcile the demands and expectations of her charmingly intrusive Greek family with her own ambitions. When Fotoula falls in love with the very un-Greek Ian Miller (John Corbett, a.k.a. Aidan from Sex and the City), she must merge two cultures and rediscover the value of her roots.

Like Fotoula's grumpy father (Michael Constantine), who spends his days providing medical care with Windex, "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" possesses an undeniable charm. In Fotoula, Vardalos, who also penned the script, has created an intelligent woman, keenly aware of the giant gap that separates her family from the mainstream America she longs to experience.

While one can easily see why Miller falls for Fotoula, understanding why America has fallen for the movie is not as simple. Having seen it twice, I can honestly say that while "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" is a nice movie, even a good movie; it's far from being anything special. Vardalos' script hits the right comedic and romantic beats, however, it never seems to take off and only rarely does it reach its obvious comic potential. Joel Zwick's direction competently balances the absurdity of Fotoula's family with the sincerity of her dreams, but for the most part, Zwick seems content to settle for the uninspired.

Why then, has this little movie, reportedly made for five million dollars, outlasted "Spiderman" in theaters, while grossing more than one-hundred million- dollars in the process? Perhaps, the answer lies not in the movie itself, but in today's movies in general.

You don't need a degree in film theory to realize that we're living through a disturbing time for American movies. It seems that Hollywood is producing fewer and fewer quality movies each year and despite this summer's high box office returns, the problem only seems to be getting worse. We are far from the great movies of the '70s.

The bottom line is, a movie should tell an entertaining story in a visual way. If it speaks to some universal human truth or metaphorically relates a Western gunfight to the Red Scare, then that's great too, but at the very least, it should tell you a story. Easier said than done. Today, movies are designed to be rides, not stories, playing to the audiences' senses, instead of their emotions. If you still think I'm way off, try to recall the blockbusters of our youth, such as "Raiders of the Lost Ark" or "Ghostbusters," which endure in our collective conscious because audiences responded to more than marketing campaigns. Too often today we as consumers allow ourselves to fall prey to the blitz of studio marketing, anointing movies as blockbusters long before they arrive in theaters.

Fifteen years ago, I doubt "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" could have become the phenomenon it is today. Back then, if you wanted to glimpse another culture or class through the soft lens of romantic comedy, you had "Moonstruck" or "Pretty Woman." In essence, each of these films is just a re-imagining of the Cinderella story we have all known since childhood, as is "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding," which seems influenced both by the fairytale and these modern cinematic variations.

Perhaps, years from now, people will use "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" as a reference point for the evolution of the romantic comedy. I doubt it though. "Moonstruck," "Working Girl" and "Pretty Woman" were films that, somehow, managed to transcend their time. "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding," however, sweet it may be, is a sad sign of our times, demonstrating that in an age of famine, the people will flock to some soggy *Moussaka*.

Jeremiah Friedman '05 is a new film review for the Arts sections. His reviews will run on alternate weeks with Matt Kertman '05.

Whimsical installation provokes response

By Laura Goldblatt
Contributing Writer

It doesn't take a fine art connoisseur to appreciate the wonder that is now on display at the University's Zilkha Gallery. Greek artist Yannis Ziogas created his "Ballads" to represent the notion of travel, a subject familiar and important to him. The exhibit's unconventional use of space stimulated positive feedback from students and faculty alike.

Ziogas' installation features an airy web of cords, rope, wooden bridges and ladders, all strategically suspended from the ceiling. Miniature trees and men with binoculars can be detected upon careful circumnavigation, which undoubtedly add perspective and contribute to the themes of travel and destination.

The work consists of four ballads, three of which are on display in Zilkha (The Ballad of the Forgotten Tree, The Ballad of the Toy Train of the New Agitatsia and The Ballad of the Lost Sight). The fourth part is currently on display in Athens, where the four pieces will converge next month.

"In that way, I will connect two very important places for me: Greece, where I come from, and the United States, from where I draw ideas and open my visual aesthetics," Ziogas said.

The show came to the University after Zilkha Gallery Curator of Exhibitions Nina Felshin saw a Ziogas installation in New York City.

"I liked the playful qualities, along with the serious aspects," said Felshin. "I felt he could use the space at Zilkha very well."

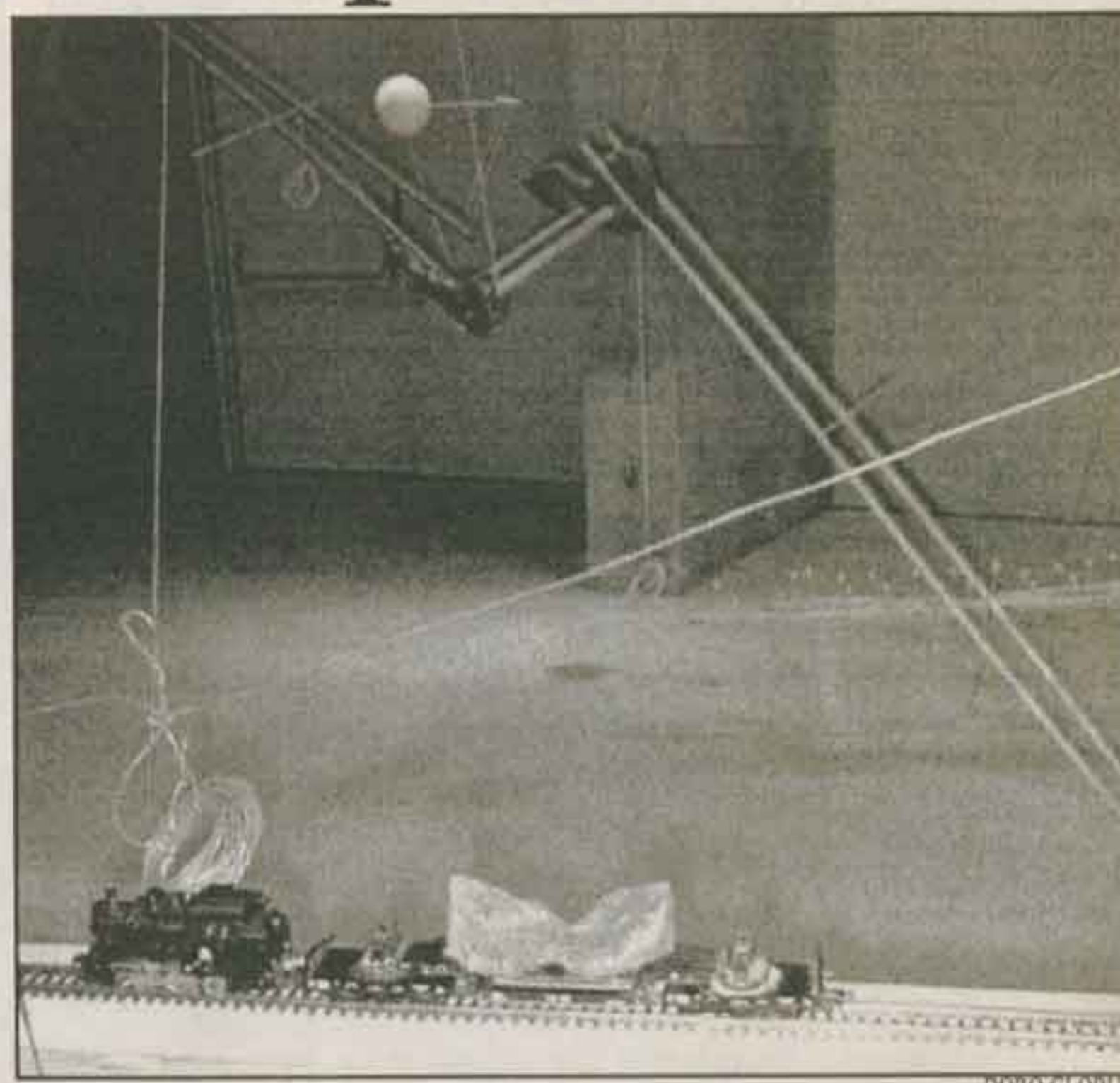
Students agree that Ziogas' utilization of space is somewhat of an anomaly.

"I thought it was cool that it was designed to be walked around so that you could see all of the details," said Katie Brown '06.

Ziogas' employment of simple materials, such as toy trains, soldiers, wooden tracks and ladders, allows visitors to relate to the artwork. While most people have owned such objects at some point in their lives, incorporating them into artwork is something new and different.

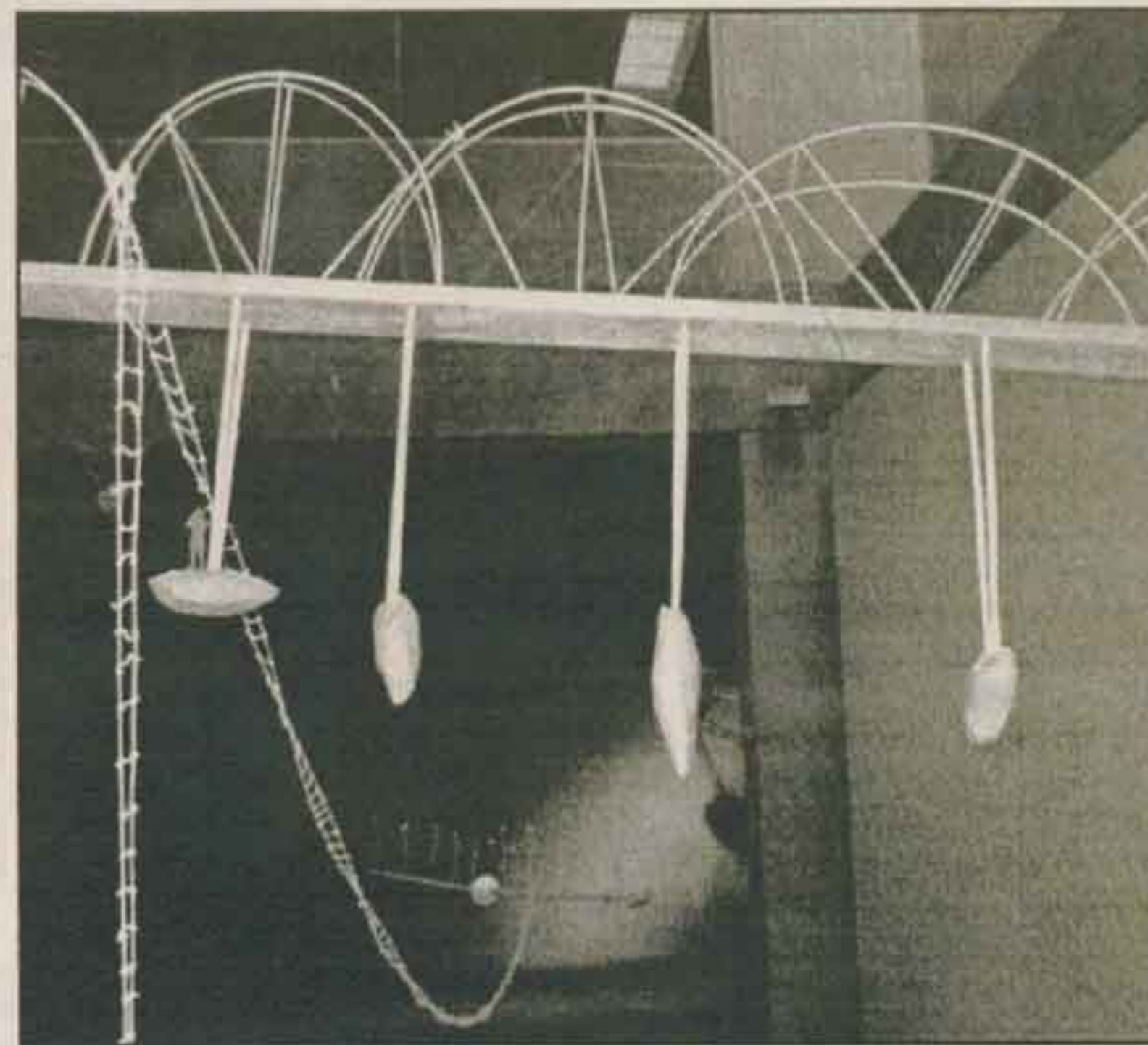
The mechanical components, however, can introduce technical problems, as one student noted in her reaction to the piece.

"I liked the exhibit," said Madeline Shapiro '06. "But I was a little



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Yannis Ziogas' exhibit, "Ballads," which is currently in the Zilkha Gallery, uses a combination of cords, rope, wooden bridges and ladders to suspend a number of items such as miniature trees.



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disappointed that the train didn't work.

Nevertheless, Shapiro enjoyed the exhibit, and later told Felshin, "[I] was very impressed by how quickly Ziogas installed the work."

According to Ziogas, he constructed many of the work's pieces over the past year, then brought them to the University in mid-August and installed them in only four days.

Many students became engrossed in Ziogas' intricate weavings.

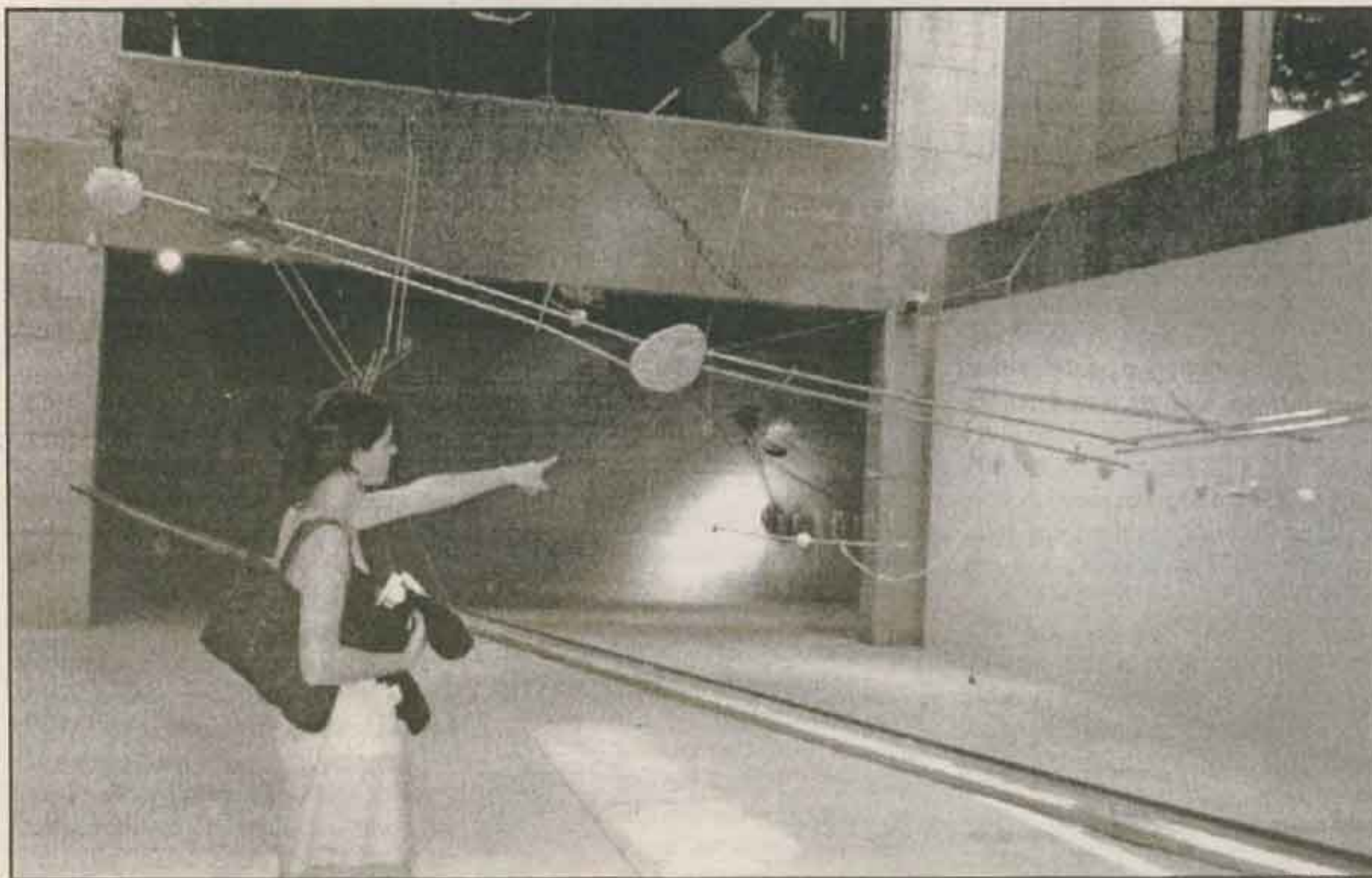
"It was so whimsical and delicate, like a spider's web," said Chris Lake

'05. "I wanted to run around and snap it apart like a bunch of toothpicks."

Although most students did not partake in Lake's destructive desires, they shared in his fervor upon viewing the wondrous construction.

Ziogas' installation will remain on display in the Zilkha Gallery through Oct. 20, when it will be dismantled and sent to Athens to join the fourth component.

The Zilkha Gallery is open Tuesday - Sunday, noon - 4 p.m.



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Laura Sinkman '05 examines the new exhibit, "Ballads," in the Zilkha Gallery. The exhibit offers students the opportunity to walk through the artwork and examine its components.

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