

Reflections on labor, from a revolutionary viewpoint

■ Objects of Labor, Park Place, to Nov. 29.

By ELIZABETH GODLEY

A whiff of revolution hangs in the reconditioned air on the 14th floor of Park Place, emanating from pieces by 15 Vancouver artists, all reflections on the subject of work.

These artists may know their Marx, but they've consigned the hero-laborer of 1930s-style social realism to the dustbin of history. Today's worker, they say, more resembles the serf who toiled to fatten the landowners of the middle ages. And in place of the medieval church — all powerful, all seeing, its tentacles influencing every aspect of life — the modern-day corporation rules the lives of its workers.

So you conclude from Daniel Congdon's clever offering, an open attache case displayed like a relic on an altar draped in grey flannel. Marble lines one side of the case, three romanesque arches embellish the other, completing the transformation from everyday object to charged symbol.

For Lorna Brown, the altar becomes a photocopying machine, spewing out images that mould our minds and infiltrate our dreams. In her updated medieval triptych depicting the Annunciation, Brown comments on the corruption of love, marriage and motherhood by modern society.

The uneasy partnership between God and Mammon is made graphic in Margot Butler's powerful sculptural piece, a broken cross composed of cracked concrete blocks. But the point where the arms of the cross meet is empty, except for a sheet of glass.

In gold lettering on the glass, the artist explains how, during construction of Park Place, the foundations of Christ Church Cathedral were cracked. "Reparations to the rift were carried out through an accord between the two neighbors."

Anyone who has ever answered an office telephone will appreciate Susan Madsen's poignant paen to the receptionist, a copper-wire sculpture flanked by four framed typescripts of rapid corporatese — "Good afternoon. No, I'm sorry, he's tied up just now. Yes, I

know your call is urgent sir, but he's been busy all morning. Yes sir. All right. Yes, that was my mistake" — that occasionally slips gears into gabble.

Also for the white-collar crowd, Patrick Foley provides a tongue-in-cheek calendar of the icons of working life: baloney sandwiches, ironing, traffic jams and fantasy vacations on tropical islands.

The only work in this show that even hints at the heroic is Chung Hing's all-white installation. Although uniformly moulded in white plaster, each of the workmen who clamber on the bamboo scaffolding has an individual presence.