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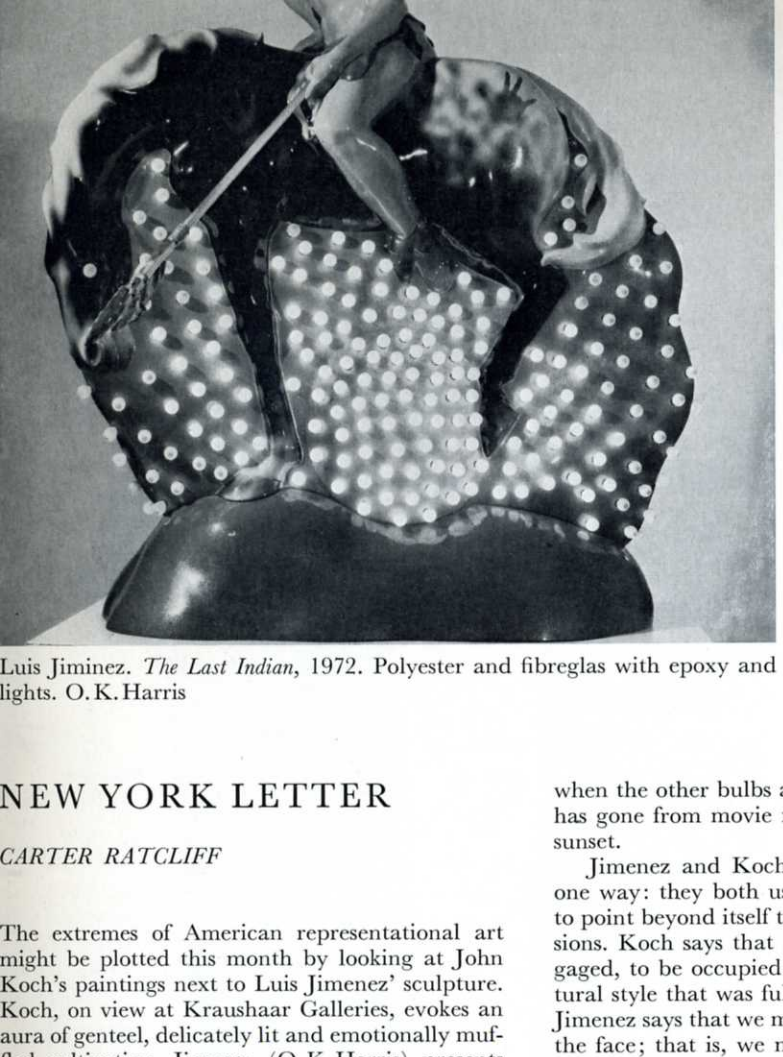
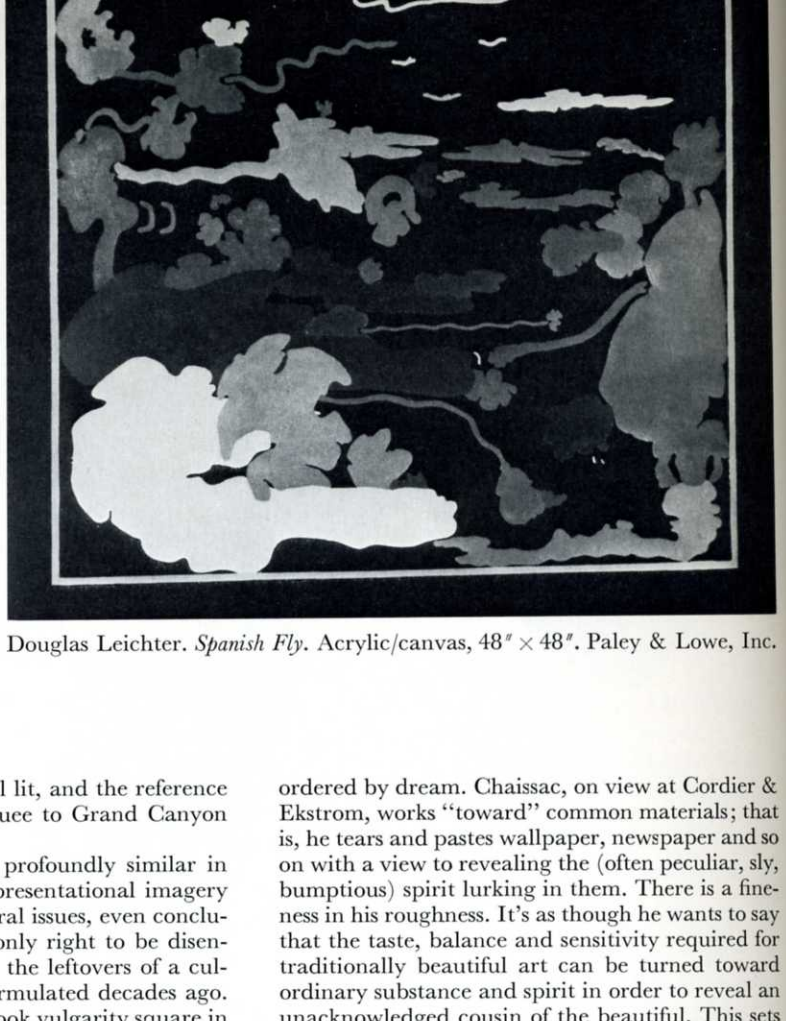


Luis Jiminez. *The Last Indian*, 1972. Polyester and fibreglas with epoxy and lights. O.K. Harris



Douglas Leichter. *Spanish Fly*. Acrylic/canvas, 48″ × 48″. Paley & Lowe, Inc.

NEW YORK LETTER

CARTER RATCLIFF

The extremes of American representational art might be plotted this month by looking at John Koch's paintings next to Luis Jimenez' sculpture. Koch, on view at Kraushaar Galleries, evokes an aura of genteel, delicately lit and emotionally muffled cultivation. Jimenez (O.K. Harris) presents monuments to sheer, screaming vulgarity. One of his works shows a pop singer made of inflated vinyl with a pudgy, puffy cloud of flames (a song?) shooting from his mouth. People in Koch's paintings appear mostly to whisper, when they aren't snoozing in quietly but sumptuously appointed interiors. The difference between these two artists is between the over- and the under-privileged. Koch's art ends by seeming over-stuffed—with standards of taste, of simplicity, of education larding each other until his imagery is soaked and heavy. Neither Koch nor the people he depicts seem able to inhabit the present. And they have none of the hidebound energy of the earlier culture whose forms they ape. These works are devices in a slow-moving game of escape and evasion. Finally the delicate light which is Koch's specialty—and perhaps what he considers to be his saving grace—is unconvincing: it begins to take on a sheen, a crassness.

Jimenez is aggressive in expressing the pain inflicted on the uneducated sensibility by the overload of the urban landscape. And he is able to suggest how this pain is converted to "pleasure" by the expedient of a desire worked up for the perfection of industrial finish, for hot color and a caricature of voluptuous shape. He is aware of the two-sided awfulness of his images and rather preciously points them up. This is the chief difference between him and the snooty Koch: Jimenez knows what he is doing; his suffering, his bearing up under vulgarity, has resulted in works with a grasp of their own meaning. His version in plastic of a famous statue of a dying Indian chief is brilliant—literally and otherwise—in its tastelessness. The Indian is mounted on a horse. The area between the animal's front and back legs is solid and inset with electric bulbs that light up and go out in patterns recalling movie marquees. This piece sums up Jimenez' taste and gives an index of its sources; beside movies, they are album covers, bad public sculpture, banal illustrations in magazines and children's history books, the funny papers, trademarks, drive-in restaurant architecture, and more. Naturally the horse's eyes light up—but only when the other bulbs are all lit, and the reference has gone from movie marquee to Grand Canyon sunset.

Jimenez and Koch are profoundly similar in one way: they both use representational imagery to point beyond itself to moral issues, even conclusions. Koch says that it is only right to be disengaged, to be occupied with the leftovers of a cultural style that was fully formulated decades ago. Jimenez says that we must look vulgarity square in the face; that is, we must look at it in a fine art setting. Louis Finkelstein is different from these two. In an exhibition of drawings at the gallery of the New York Studio School, he shows his concern for a "particular awareness, which nature at the moment revealed to me [these quotations are from notes that accompany the show], and which, at least so it seems to me, will never at any other moment be quite the same kind of awareness".

These drawings—of the landscape in southern France—integrate three specificities: that of landscape seen from a single viewpoint, of the perceptual apparatus that does the seeing, and of a particular configuration of line. They do not point beyond themselves; that is not their representational function: they gather these disparate specificities to themselves; that is, the drawn configuration gathers aspects (meanings) of the others to itself, while leaving the way open back to them. These are beautiful—I mean, fully specific, fully engaged—drawings. And their engagement is finally a moral one, more significant, I think, than Koch's or Jimenez', because, as the precipitate of the artist's self-consciousness, it precipitates something similar in the viewer.

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The Martha Jackson Gallery is showing recent canvases by Frank Lobdell. He is in the Surrealist vein, a representationalist, but not at all photographic. In the late forties and early fifties he was associated with the Abstract Expressionists; some of the touch and texture of that period can be seen in his work. But his concerns are behind the surface. Energetic, irregular figures can be made out. They seem immense in their dancing, gesturing postures because the space behind them (which is often to be seen through them) seems very grand in scale; and they usually reach from top to bottom of the canvas. Clowns, dancers, crowned figures cavort monumentally—and menacingly. On occasion one will have seemed to gathered the moon into its embrace. Or its shape will recall the ordinary schematic for a star. A rapid, sketchy, explosive style appears to be working in the direction of cosmic concerns.

Lobdell works back from dreams to a universe ordered by dream. Chaissac, on view at Cordier & Ekstrom, works "toward" common materials; that is, he tears and pastes wallpaper, newspaper and so on with a view to revealing the (often peculiar, sly, bumptious) spirit lurking in them. There is a fineness in his roughness. It's as though he wants to say that the taste, balance and sensitivity required for traditionally beautiful art can be turned toward ordinary substance and spirit in order to reveal an unacknowledged cousin of the beautiful. This sets him apart from Dubuffet, whose shapes and textures seem to be lingering in the vicinity of Chaissac's art. Where Dubuffet wants to demolish the traditional in order to reveal its eternal (?) substratum, Chaissac wants to enlarge tradition. Where Dubuffet is suspect for the beauties that sneak into his work, Chaissac is convincing for the ones he invites. The range of his hand's accomplishment, which is only hinted at in the collages and totems, is made fully clear in his gouaches.

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"Brute Art", found art, and Surrealism have been so important to the founding of the contemporary sensibility that one can overlook their influence in the work of new artists. Perhaps it's not correct to speak of something so pervasive as an influence. At any rate, the paintings of Douglas Leichter (Paley & Lowe) started out with acrylic drippings only vaguely recalling landscape and have gone now toward specific reference—and it is a haunted, magical reference, hence the relation to Surrealism, and to Dubuffet. The texture of process dominated a year ago, but that has receded to reveal strange organic shape clarifying itself out of dripping and trailing. High-keyed, almost fluorescent blobs of paint wriggle, float and hang against darkly stained fields. The landscape—or perhaps it's an underwater seascape—is framed and this makes it look like something observed through an optical instrument or the window of a bathyscope, or perhaps on the page of picture book.

Leichter is a quirky representationalist. Sharon Brant's paintings take part of their value from the way they drift toward representation (again, of landscape) and away from it. Her unstretched, low-keyed canvases are stained with faint, cloudy color. Sometimes a layer of unevenly spread transparent medium will alter the surface quality so that color is seen through reflection. Where the medium is thick, it can form edges which suggest maps. Again, this is extremely delicate: Brant alludes with these forms, giving breadth to concerns that are almost entirely formal. Drawn lines (which seemed a little too schematic in her previous paintings) cross and unite the surface, referring as much to its slackness as to particular shape. Light, depth

atmospheric color all return to this surface. Though it is not stretched, it has a kind of tautness; at least, a precise, intense focus. Finally, the paintings concern light. Brant's command of it is impressive. This is a beautiful, evocative show. (O. K. Harris.)

David Diao is showing new paintings at Reese Palley. He has always been interesting to me because he seemed connected to the edgeless space of the sublime. He seemed to approach it, perhaps to have invented a variation on it. But he never really fitted with Rothko, Still, or his "sublime" contemporaries—Jack Seery, for example. His latest show, with its taut surfaces and delicate but very deliberate play on the edge and its internal divisions of the canvas, puts him quite a distance from the sublime. (This is not a judgment of quality. The *sublime* is descriptive, not a qualitative label.)

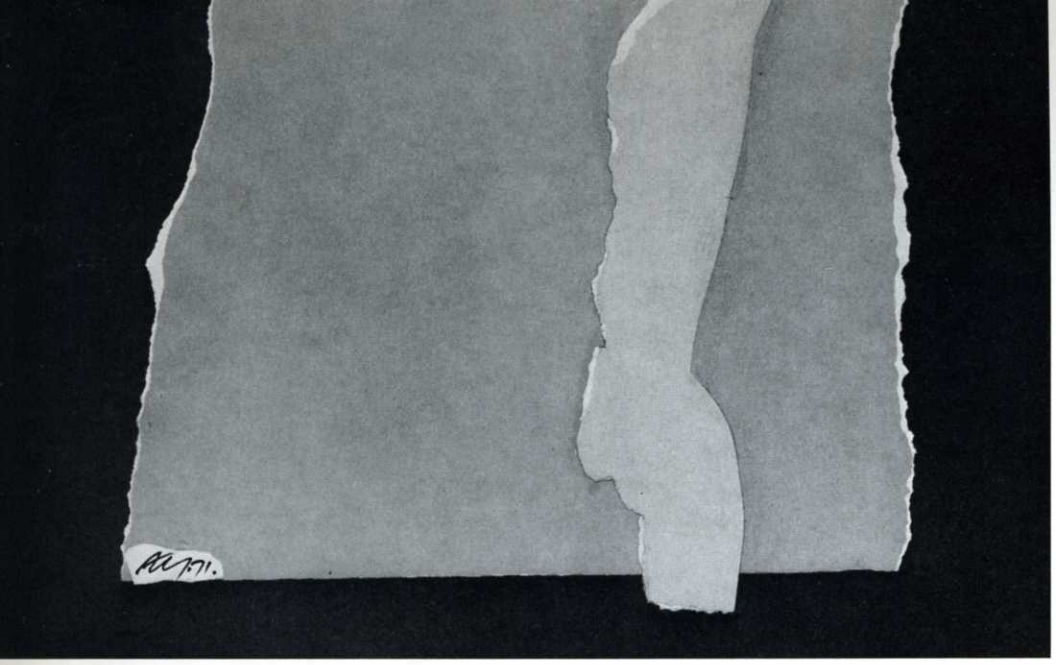
Color—its "weight" and surface tension—seems to be his interest here. A wide area will be spread with a single hue and set next to a similar area in another, often not closely related one. Sometimes the surface will be smooth and reflective; sometimes it will be ragged, allowing color to show from beneath. Almost always there will be patches of color showing at corners or along the line where the large areas approach each other. Depth is evoked and given literally—one can reconstruct the layering process (more or less). But all is subsumed in a unified flash of surface presence. Diao's color construction presents a space that is neither in the sublime nor traditionally architectural. It is sheerly visual, an "opticality" of the present moment.

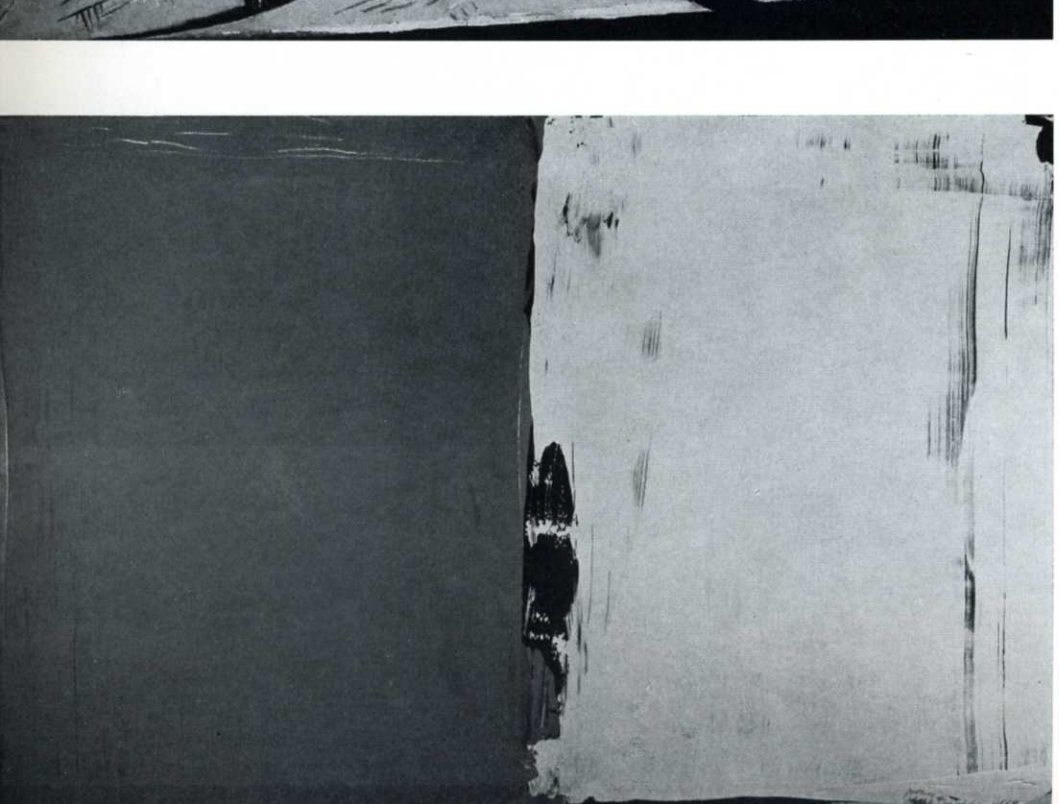
Leo Castelli (downtown) is showing Michael Balog, who gives an extreme version of painterliness. His starting place is ironic, an unexceptionable, decorative field of pastel color—a traditional dilution of New York painterliness. He then pours acid in (decoratively placed) strips across the surface. These eat through the canvas, leaving narrow gaps with rather prettily colored edges where the acid has worked on the paint. There is a logic to this development, but it is not compelling. It pushes the anxious, destructive side of Abstract Expressionism to an extreme which is meaningless because it leads to invisibility coupled with banality. The energy of the Abstract Expressionists had meaning only so long as it guided its potential for self-defeat away from both these temptations.

Chaissac. Gouache, 1961. Cordier & Ekstrom

The question of what the edge of the canvas can contain is usually put in terms of line or an unbroken expanse of color (or colors). Doug Ohlson covers his surfaces with sprayed discs whose blurred edges bring vibrantly outrageous colors toward each other, but not into contact. The question becomes, how much *constrast* can the edge contain? High-keyed orange shapes will be mixed with even higher-keyed green ones; they seem to compete with each other in pushing up to the surface—and this only accounts for half a painting

Sharon Brant. Untitled painting in transparent latex, graphite, ink and acrylic on canvas, 96″ × 144″. 1972. O. K. Harris





The green-orange system of contrasts is itself contrasted with a red and blue system on the other, the left, side of the canvas. I said Ohlson's colors are outrageous in these combinations—but there is a delicacy and unity to the overall effect which wins out, but to provide further contrast in its turn, for these paintings find a serenity in visual aggressiveness, a calm toughness which awakens the eye's—and the imagination's—capacity for precision. (Fischbach.)

Mike Goldberg's new canvases, like those of a year ago, are painted with metallic pigment (Paley & Lowe). What might be harsh and at home in the industrial finish "school" is instead quietly and subtly gestural. Goldberg has elaborated the faint grids of the earlier works so that they lead up to and into the acutely angled sectioning developed in still earlier paintings. One enters a pictorial space I'd call meditational if that didn't take away somewhat from the intense specificity of the surfaces he has achieved. They have a deep focus that is inclusive rather than the opposite—for it doesn't bear one into deep space: there are no vanishing points, no disappearances; instead, there are the complexities of painterly intention making themselves manifest, present, self-evident.

The Whitney's exhibition of Adja Yunkers' recent paintings is concurrent with C&D Editions' publications of related silk screen prints. Yunkers has turned his earlier gesture toward spareness, sometimes even to the *depiction* of gesture—narrow, swerving line will reveal itself to be pasted onto the canvas; the torn edge of a large scrap of pasted paper will turn out to have been painted on. These toned-down lavender, greyish works have a misty, retrospective quality. They are filled with faint but clear echoes. The Whitney show includes a collage in homage to Braque. Perhaps the "classical tendencies" which this work means to certify are what Yunkers is encouraging in his recent works. At any rate, they are impressively realized as they are, and that, for all the elevated nostalgia they contain, is enough to make them new.

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Paintings which are, in effect, walls of tissue paper flutter and faintly glow at the Benedek Gallery. Gyora Novak crumpled the paper, uncrumpled it and pinned it to canvas—or perhaps linen. The pieces of paper are set in neat rows, overlapping like shingles; sometimes the work is monochrome, sometimes it is rather inclusive and raucous. Breezes *we* don't feel will ruffle these already ruffled surfaces. I call the works paintings because it is by painting's standards that they will be judged. The verdict isn't harsh: only a bit distracted. Why this? the absent-minded creature seems to say. Why not, on the contrary, something else? Something that covers the surface, rather than all too delicately touching upon it; something that finds its own texture, rather than unfolding it as if it were the message of an anonymous, indecipherable, but for all that still friendly letter . . . ? Novak's works must be called paintings because they are so much like the ideally *nice* paintings that have been threatening to appear out of recent devolopments for several seasons now.

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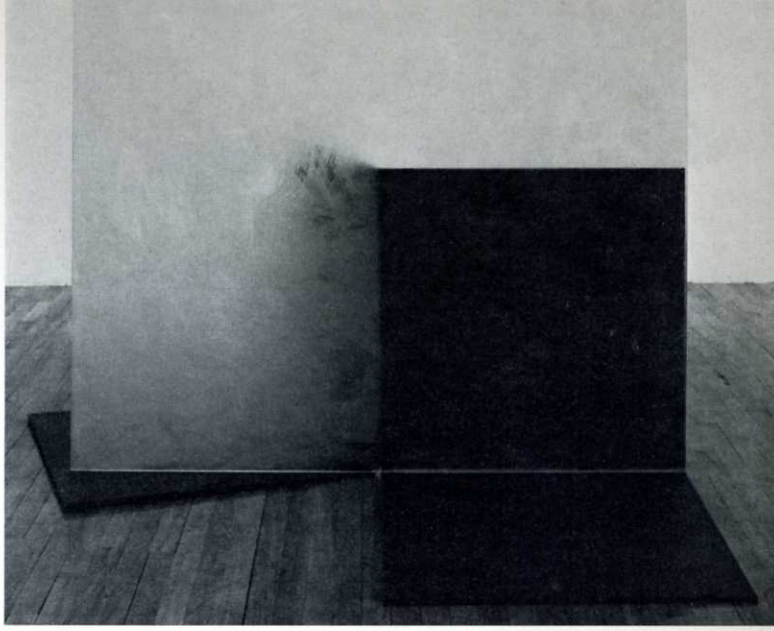
Chris Wilmarth is showing new work at Paula Cooper Gallery. He continues to employ glass and metal. The two substances—as he selects them—make a stunning combination: the metal is sober and serious; the glass has an icy, Romantic glow which is perhaps putting sobriety in terms of urban light. One of the things conspicuously lacking among the Bauhaus architects and sculptors was someone with Wilmarth's delicacy of touch. The remark rests on the way he shares with the Bauhaus people an interest in giving literal realization to certain aspects of Cubist structure: Wilmarth's pieces are cool and finely balanced, but they do display a bit of tension, as if they included in themselves signs of a desire to expand to the scale of architecture. First of all, they repeat the general principles of last year's show, but they are bigger. And they are surer, with all the sureness revealing

Michael Balog. *MOO*, 1971. Polyester, resin and fibreglas, 8′3″ × 8′3″. Leo Castelli



Chris Wilmarth. *Wyoming*, 1971–72. Acidized glass, steel and wire, 60″ × 68″ × 53″. Paula Cooper Gallery

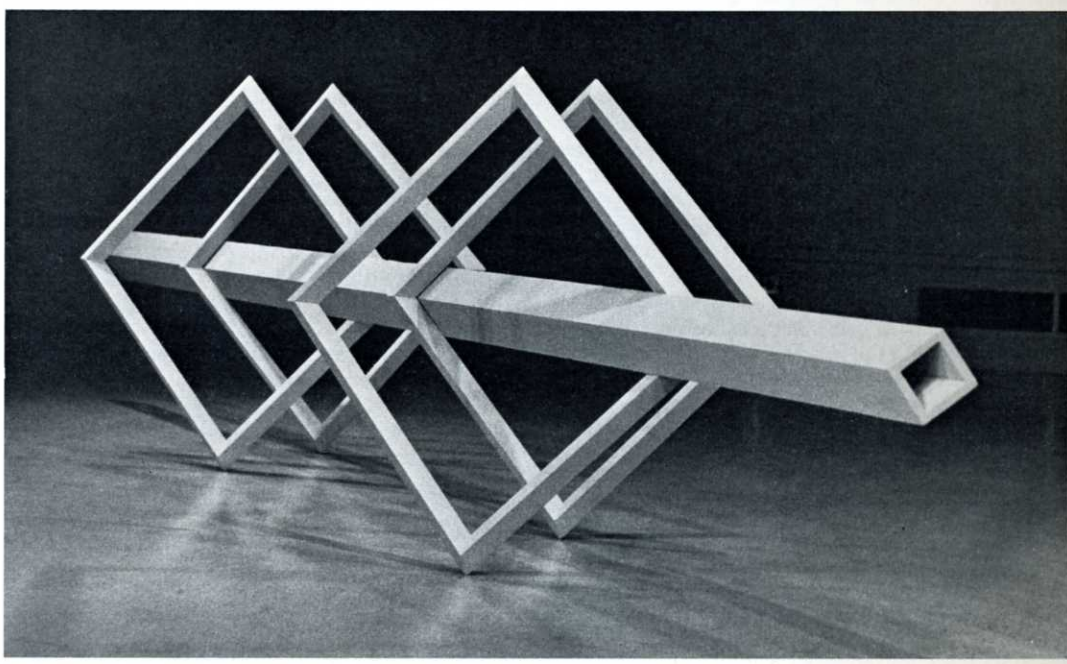
itself in a capacity to resolve structure across a larger area with less detailing. Further, the style is not evolving out of itself in this show, but toward the reconciliation of stylistic flash with esthetic grasp which is always at the root of the rare public modes of distinction. I think his control of translucence—his sureness of touch in deciding when to frost the glass, when to bend it and when to back it with a sheet of metal—deserves to be seen at a still larger scale.

The Spectrum Gallery is showing bright, sharp reductivist sculpture by F. M. Rennels. Hollow square bars are suspended as they are interlaced with lengths of the same bar, reduced in diameter and formed into square figures. Sharp angles will reverse each other, finally working to give each other support. The structure of a piece will turn out to be founded on shape which seemed at first peripheral. There is an elegance, a doubling of independent figures with structural function, which hovers on the edge of paradox and then settles—tensely—at an almost mathematical elegance. And once this elegance is accepted as the norm, the show takes on an air of ease.

We saw Clement Meadmore's recent work before we saw the pieces from the early sixties which are now on view at Max Hutchinson. They have the solidity and balance of his later sculpture; the curved form is only hinted at in a vertical column slightly bent. These are just as spare, just as reticent in detail as later works. Perhaps they are more totemic than gestural in overall configuration. An expanded version human scale has gone on to become an extended version of motion at that scale.

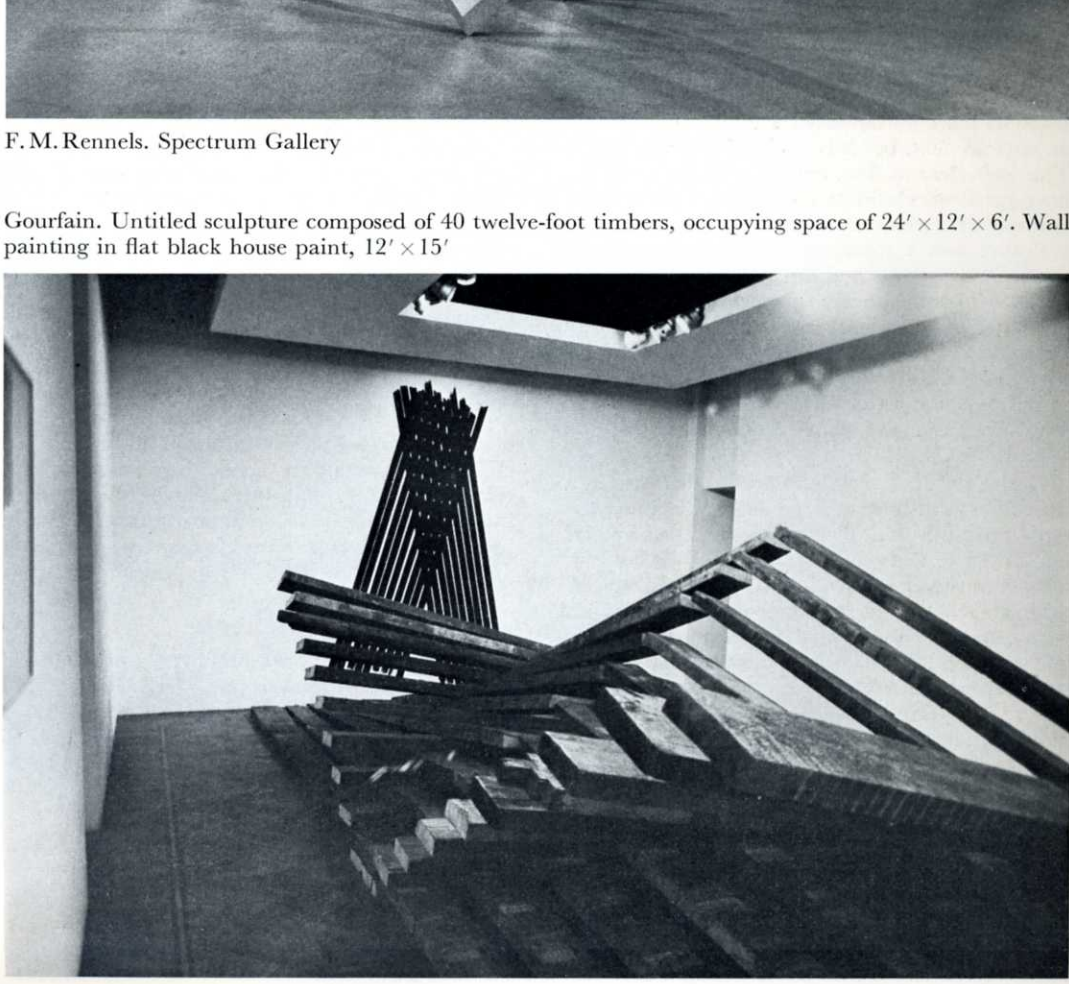
Julius Tobias is showing concurrently with Meadmore at Hutchinson. His projected scale is even grander than Meadmore's present one—his purpose is entirely different. He doesn't present single works, but mock-ups of sculptural environments. In these, tilted concrete slabs form a pattern of wide paths and sheltered spaces. The slabs are roughly three times as high as the human figure. Tobias suggests the monumental beauties to be achieved by seizing on the intensity of architectural cluster, and—maintaining its scale or the sense of it—emptying out its forms until they're able to cast clarified, uniform shadows.

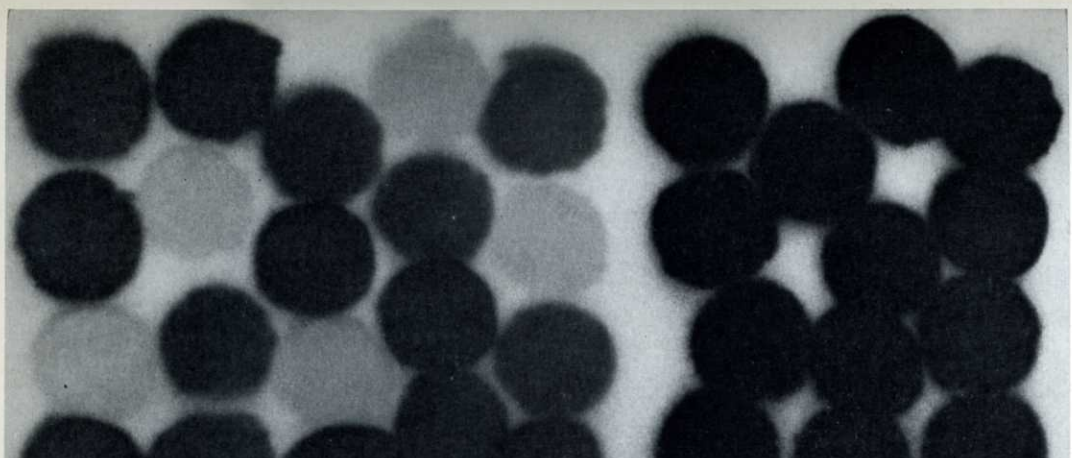
Tobias' style is that of urban redemption, an improvement of already existing form. Peter Gourfain's is predicated on a unity between urban and natural structure. It's not surprising that his works allude to an iconography of jetties, piers, sea walls and other "architecture" which signals a transition point between industry (or transportation) and nature, the elements, especially wind and the sea. In order to block any notion that Gourfain is interested in evoking the lonely edges of the city, let me say that his art is only peripherally allusive. At



F. M. Rennels. Spectrum Gallery

Gourfain. Untitled sculpture composed of 40 twelve-foot timbers, occupying space of 24′ × 12′ × 6′. Wall painting in flat black house paint, 12′ × 15′





Doug Ohlson. *Basal*, 1971. Acrylic/canvas, 5′7″ × 11′2″. Fischbach Gallery

its center is a strong constructive sense—a unique one for it is not a modification of Cubism; it is not constructivist. But if it's not that, it's very hard to characterize. It must arrive from an intuition of the quality of standard form. Gourfain interweaves heavy, unmodified beams in these current works. Texture has a lot to do with their final appearance, but underlying that is tensile strength and degrees of flexibility—qualities which must be the artist's chief concerns (or medium). At any rate, his work has a solidness and economy that makes it seem self-sufficient, and natural—all the more so for not finally owing anything to Nature. These traits are carried over into two-dimensions in wall drawings in which wide strokes of color are interwoven much as the beams are interwoven in his sculpture.

Robert Rohm used to place grids of rope against the wall and then cut certain strands, inflecting the pattern with its own collapse. He was a sculptor even then, but a sculptor who got a lot of ideas from pictorial grids. He has been expanding his works out into the space of the room, and here (in his latest show at O.K. Harris) he fills that space. The rope is still in evidence, slung in bundles from heavy wooden frameworks or enclosed in open structures of heavy wire. One enters the environment across a platform on sawhorses beneath which a wire structure rests on filled burlap bags. The area under the platform is lighted by industrial-style electric light fixtures. One has the impression of stumbling into a work area unaccountably clean. There is a ladder-like structure in wood propped against the wall by wooden beams held in place by more burlap sacks. The show does create an environment, but it is made of separate works. This isn't clear at first, nor does the information, once received, elucidate much about Rohm's intention. He seems caught somewhere between sculpture and a transportable architecture. The atmosphere surrounding this work is slightly frantic, in spite of the dowdy elegance and neatness of his materials—and because of the persistent mysteriousness of his structures. One is asked to admire as pure form what clearly took a lot a sheer energy to put together. One wants to know more about the energy and less about the form, which has become predictable.

R.J. Krezner wants to be predictable—up to a point. He wants one to have fully anticipated the Art Deco style of his forms—but not the surprises he works into them. (Paley & Lowe.) He cuts out numerous sheets of glass in a single, allusive, thirties-high-style shape; then mounts them against each other, sometimes enclosing them in a Deco-inspired metal framework. These are small objects, especially in relation to the architecture and interior decorating to which they refer: a piece in aluminum and glass which looks in a photograph as if it would fill the lobby of a movie palace is in fact only twelve inches high. This reduction makes them like toys, whereas their glitter and the prove-

The downtown Sonnabend Gallery is presenting what looks like a retrospective of the career of the Italian artist, Piero Manzoni. He died in the early sixties, leaving behind a large body of work and a reputation which hasn't yet been made clear in the New York scene—this is the first time he has shown here. One only gathers, so far, that he was something of a legend while he lived and that his legend has grown after his death.

He joins the ranks of a large number of artists who have attained to the blank canvas—Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, Malevich. And yet his blanks are rarely that; more often they are monochrome textures, pebbles, fur, fibreglass. Sometimes it will be only canvas, cut and stitched together to give a partition to the surface; other times the surface will swirl up in literalization of texture—or drapery—found in certain Surrealist painting, Kurt Seligmann's or Ernst's. There are super-Dada—that is, insanely conceptual—pieces, such as the roll of paper containing a line one thousand meters long. He planned to place even larger rolls at various places around the world, enough so that a line long enough to stretch along the entire equator would be given—in potential anyway. He also placed several squat tablets in the earth, engraved with upside-down inscriptions to the effect that the earth rests on them.

It can be seen that he was far from having presented heroically blank works. On the contrary, he was an examiner and commentator on modernist ideas, similar on the one hand to Johns and Rauschenberg (this is his "painterly" side), and, on the other, to artists such as Les Levine and Joseph Kosuth (this is his theoretical, conceptual side). His precise place in relation to European art remains a mystery at this point—but it can be said that if he was a lonely voyager at the far edge of the modernist currents, he was also a court figure somewhere between joker and wit.

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Natvar Bhavsar is showing a selection of works on paper at Max Hutchinson Gallery. They range in size from small to medium, as drawings are measured—and they are very beautiful. Bhavsar's dry pigments are extraordinarily brilliant. His clouds and waves of intermingling, dissolving and reappearing color have an immediacy, a sharply focused substance that is unique in current abstract painting. Color of this kind is unprecedented, but not enigmatic—it knows how to present itself fully.

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Alan Bermowitz continues to present tangles of light bulbs and electric cord. (O.K. Harris.) His configurations have gotten a little premeditated since his show last year, but this doesn' detract. His imagery is so gross in its allusions—to urban lighting of all kinds—and so overbearing in its effects that the vulgarity of banal composition is hardly

these works blink and flash with such aggres randomness that light begins to cancel itself, t ing into a dazzled darkness, the real urban li Bermowitz wants you to see stars.

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I said last month the Museum of Modern was at last presenting itself in a good light wit exhibit of Picasso's painting. It is keeping up good work—the only work it is really fitted f with an exhibit of a wide selection of Mati sculpture.

Matisse is of course regarded chiefly as a pa er. The sculpture is highly considered but kep the side. This can be justified with details fron student career. He had no trouble ente Moreau's atelier, but he had to be satisfied to s with Rodin's pupil, Antoine Bourdelle, not R himself. His painting and découpage *is* prim for it allows him to engage color, but on the sic form—especially the form of the female bo sculpture seems as important to Matisse as the dimensional mediums. Thus, if he is a major t tieth century figure (as he is), he must be co ered a major sculptor of the period.

Matisse achieved in all his mediums fo developments which have turned out to be cen But his motives—unlike those of the analy Cubists, say—are never even close to purely mal. He is interested in expression. This point the close connection between Fauvism (Mat first mature style of painting) and the Expres ism contemporary with it in Germany. It's te ing to say that Fauvism is simply a superior of Expressionism; perhaps it is that with m Fauves. But with Matisse, in all periods o career, it becomes a matter of seeing how fo decisions can be charged in the course of a with the extra-artistic meanings which Expres ist theories assume can be translated, fully-for into an inert medium. His Fauvism is not con ed to German stylistics.

Matisse often spoke of expression, but he n felt it necessary to make the fundamental dis tion of meaning that tries to express itself by fo imposition (Expressionism) and meaning w grows out of an engagement with a medium. meanings are the latter kind, and finally not e artistic though they are never purely formal. keeps his expressiveness from sinking to the lev Expressionism. His strange female forms are distortions; they are not *bizarreries*, hybrids duced by the inability of emotion to blend

R.J. Krezner. Untitled, 1972. Glass and minium, 11″ × 7¾″ × 5¾″. Paley & Lowe