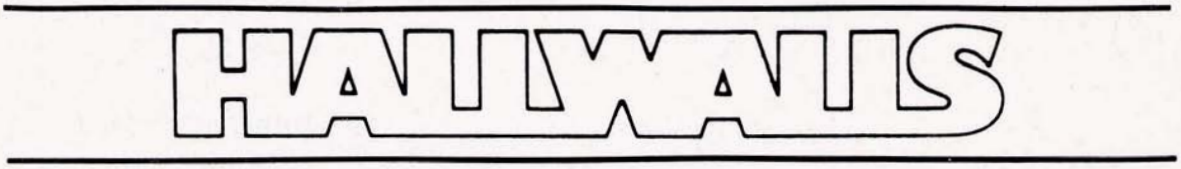
HALLWALLS

COLOR, LIGHT AND MASS:
TEN SCULPTORS

Nancy Arlen
Gary Burnley
Tom Butter
R.M. Fischer
Skip Koebbeman
Tom Rankin
F.L. Schroder
Gib Smith
Taro Suzuki
John Toth



COLOR, LIGHT AND MASS:

TEN SCULPTORS

Nancy Arlen
Gary Burnley
Tom Butter
R.M. Fischer
Skip Koebbeman
Tom Rankin
F.L. Schroder
Gib Smith
Taro Suzuki
John Toth

For contributions to this catalogue, HALLWALLS would like to thank the following:

Typesetting:	Easy Graphics
Photography:	Robert Collignon (for Tom Rankin)
	Chris Osinski (for Gary Burnley)
Design:	G. Roger Denson
Editing:	Paul Koster
Lenders:	Carey Cameron
	Anita Grossman
	Raman Schlemmer
	Holly Solomon Gallery
	Stefanotti Gallery
	The artists

This publication has been prepared in conjunction with the exhibit "Color, Light and Mass: Ten Sculptors" by G. Roger Denson for HALLWALLS, 700 Main Street, Buffalo, New York 14202.

Funding for this exhibition and catalogue has been provided by The National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, The New York State Council on the Arts, and the Committee for Visual Arts, Artists' Space.

500 COPIES PRINTED
Octobergraphics
Buffalo, New York

A limited edition of 100
catalogues contain colorslide
supplements prepared by
Studio 148.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Hallwalls is pleased to present a sculptural exhibition entitled "Color, Light and Mass: Ten Sculptors." This exhibition is the first all sculpture show which Hallwalls has mounted since the gallery started six years ago. I am sure that this was due to the previous location not having enough space for the proper viewing of three dimensional forms, whereas, our new gallery is large enough to offer the distance and the room for sculpture without structural restrictions.

As an artist-run-space, Hallwalls feels especially committed to creating exhibitions for young artists whose career potential has not yet developed. Such is the case with: Nancy Arlen, Gary Burnley, Tom Butter, R.M. Fischer, Skip Koebbeman, Tom Rankin, F L. Schroder, Gib Smith, Taro Suzuki and John Toth. Though all have worked as sculptors for quite some time, their public recognition has only been realized in the past year.

I would like to thank all of the above artists who have lent work, cooperated in the best spirit and cared enough about our gallery to be in this exhibition. I would like to recognize the hard work G. Roger Denson, the show's curator, put into writing the essay, organizing and developing a superb exhibition.

I wish to acknowledge the support for this exhibition and catalogue from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency, the New York State Council on the Arts, and The Committee for Visual Arts, Artists' Space. I am also grateful to Anita Grossman and the Holly Solomon Gallery, Judith McCabe, Robert Stefanotti and the Stefanotti Gallery.

In addition, I extend gratitude and praise to the work on this catalogue, especially Steve Baskin, Susan Paonessa, Bob Collignon, Jerry Einstandig, Debra Jenks, Nancy Golden, Paul Koster and Michael Miller.

William J. Currie
Director

COLOR, LIGHT AND MASS: (THE PHYSICS OF A SCULPTURAL METAPHOR)

By G. Roger Denson

Prior to this century, classical physics inferred color, light and mass to be elements of a three-dimensional "space." Since the turn of the century, however, this inference has been supplanted by principles inferred in quantum mechanics and relativistic physics. "Space" was reconsidered by physicists not as being separate from "time" but as being inseparably fused into a conceptual paradigm known as the four-dimensional "space-time" manifold. The apparent separateness of space and time could only be accounted for as a quality of their perceptual occurance in the brain.

Further complications arose when developments in physiology and psychology demonstrated that perception was made up of "assumed" relations between "assumed" physical things. As Bertrand Russell has illustrated, that which is seen may be outside the perception of the body, but it is not outside the body as a physical thing. The relation of the percept (a thing as it is perceived) to the physical object which is assumed was posited as being "vague, approximate and somewhat indefinite."[1] Precise knowledge of physical things as they are cannot be had. All physical occurances are therefore further located in one and only one region of space-time, that of the human nervous system. Now when considering the elements of color, light, and mass as properties of things, they must be designated as elements of a neuro-physiological (or mental) space-time.

It should not be news to anyone even remotely acquainted with the upheavals made within Western art of this century, that scientific (and consequently, technological) progressions such as these would radically alter the visions of the most highly attentive artists. Conventional and definitive notions concerning "sculpture" and "painting" have been notoriously blurred in this century. Within the last thirty years especially, all dimensional manifolds were questioned by successive generations of artists, each faction emerging with its own interpretation of what sculpture and painting are, and, what they could possibly become.

Artists who advocated the "literalness" of dimension included the Abstract Expressionists and the Minimalists. The Abstract Expressionists pursued "flatness" in their canvasses with an almost Pythagorean obsession with discovering the pictorial plane in nature. With its purity intact, they located their two-dimensional region, but had to concede that it was a non-physical, mental/visual space. Later the Minimalists, who swore by materiality and spatial "thingness," went so far as to claim that the very existence of illusionistic pictorialism had to be reconsidered as a physically extensive volume. The Minimalists even delegated perceptual phenomena such as color and line to their rigorous physical considerations.

A number of Post-minimalists emerged with enough personal integrity to pay closer attention to the qualities of specific materials without imposing rigorous spatial dimensions upon them. They tried to realize the full potential of their materials, merging color, light and/or mass varyingly according to the appropriateness of each to the material. Personal and culturally significant forms were examined with greater frequency and diversity than in either Abstract Expressionism or Minimalism. However, these investments were usually made only in the name of ambiguity. An unimposing formalism would continue to prevail, even if it were manifested by idiosyncracies.

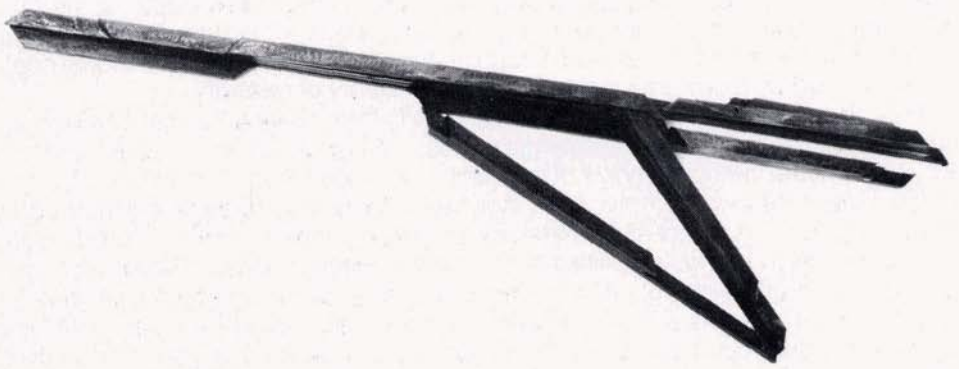
The Conceptualists, Performance artists, videomakers and a great many filmakers of the late sixties and seventies contributed to the dilemma by contending that the only valid art forms of the time were those which were uncomfortable and, consequently, unmarketable. Often armed with a political or aesthetic ideological fervor, they adhered to as total a dematerialization of art as could possibly be imagined without in any way undermining the absoluteness of the "idea." The "idea" was held as sacrosanct and an "activity" was held as the manifestation of the idea. This activity was not performed in any "two-dimensional" or "three-dimensional" manifold, but was intentionally produced in the space-time four-dimensional continuum posited by quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity.

Amid the polemics of materiality versus activity there were a number of young artists who were to mature and assimilate various "dimensionalities," "ideas" and "activities" from the various schools of art which preceeded them. From such a body of diverse ideas they would individually synthesize forms and contents that embodied both a maximum awareness of materials and dimensions as well as a predilection for the extension of these qualities in the mental space of ideas. They investigated the specific properties, not just of painting and sculpture as perceptual events, as did the Post-minimalists, but of spatial relations determined by color, light, and mass as physical occurances, as did the Conceptualists. In doing so, their analysis was not confined merely to the principles of perception, but to both perception and its correlation with the physical world. Since the Post-minimalists had already merged the "painterly" with the "sculptural," this younger generation of artists switched from painting to sculpture or from sculpture to painting with a graceful ease and lack of self-consciousness foreign to the Post-minimalists. Their forms tend to reflect this by being either more elegant in style or more humorous in their material organization and expression.

The ten sculptors in this exhibition were among those who swerved away from painting as an embodiment of their idea in favor of sculpture. Many of them carry on an ambivalent romance with painting still. However, this romance is nurtured without in any way subordinating the use of color in favor of material extension. Instead, color is used as a support for this extension, since often the materiality itself would not stand up to our scrutiny on its own.

Color, and particularly light are used to spatially demarcate mass as well as to actively engage in demonstrations of the passage of that mass through time. (The latter is especially true of Taro Suzuki's, Tom Butter's and Nancy Arlen's work. Here the reflection or deflection of light and the projection of color are major activities contingent upon the time in which a light source is directed upon the work.)

Lastly, color, light and mass are important to these artists as physical and perceptual manifestations of a growing cultural phenomenon: that of a self-conscious, overt aggression. An open, unadorned aggression has become culturally explicit and even condoned by many sectors of our culture. It can be witnessed in the multinational expansion of corporate enterprise. It fuels the political mobility of government figures, administrations and regimes. It accelerates the hegemonistic maneuvers of world nations. It is frustratingly apparent in the daily activity of urban streets. Aggression plays a role in everyone's most intimate endeavors, including sex, love and career.



F.L. Schroder
untitled, 1980
enamel on welded aluminum
74" x 24" x 5"
courtesy of the Stefanotti Gallery

The visual, musical and dramatic arts have always made use of aggression, but with the advent of the punk/new wave/no wave music scene, aggression has been emphasized with a new fury.

Color, light and mass are used by many of these artists as active and assaulting properties. It should then come as no surprise to find out that Nancy Arlen, Skip Koebbeman and F.L. Schroder have all recently been members of rock bands. Their music has contributed to the emotionalism which marks their work. In reciprocation, the ideas that propel their visual work also emerge in the style of their playing. Since much has recently been said about this interplay between music and the current visual arts in the art press, I choose not to concentrate on it here. What I wish to express, however, is the active and aggressive stance that most of these artists do take and how this stance further accelerates the momentum of aggression in our culture.[2]

With mass as one of sculpture's most historically viable principles, it might be most appropriate to commence a discussion on new sculptural forms by concentrating on it, rather than on color or light. However, one is hard pressed to do so when contemplating the work of these artists, since all but Taro Suzuki use mass either in conjunction or in negation with color and light. Mass plays an important role in much of this work today. It had been relegated in the Conceptualists' attempts of the recent past to de-materialize art but has re-emerged as an art form of social and aesthetic importance. Furthermore, it is no longer in serious conflict with its counterpart, painting.

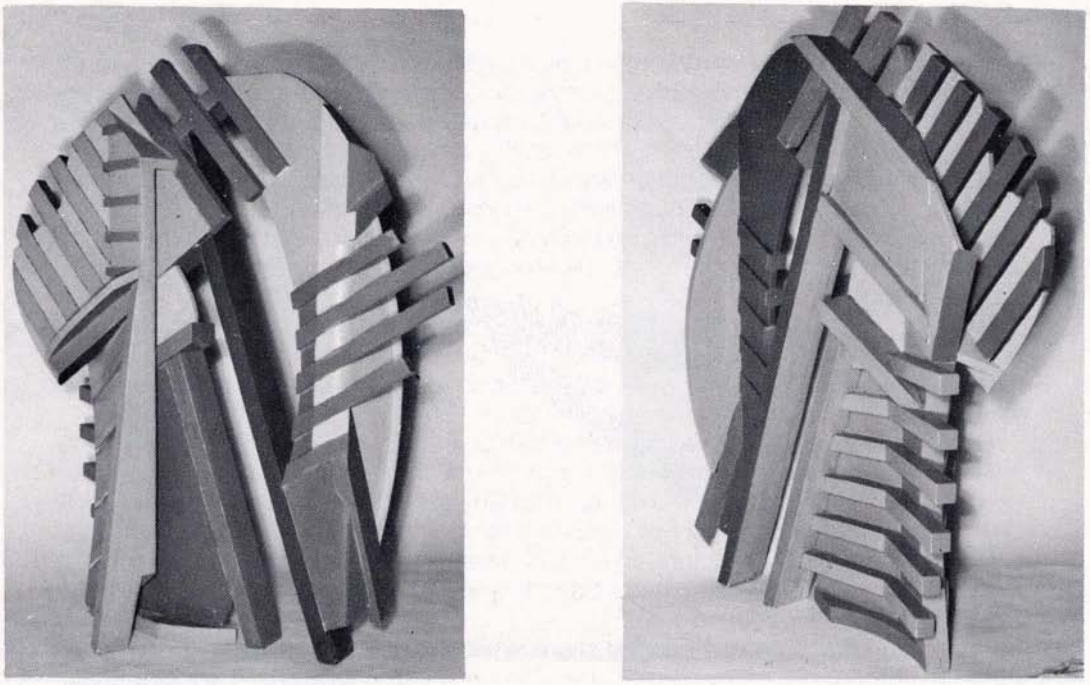
F.L. Schroder, John Toth and Gary Burnley exemplify the common urge to blur distinctions between painting and sculpture. Surface, contour and plane all blend with volume and form in their work, while color is used to designate the varying natures of balance, force, tension and direction.

Schroder's reliefs are made of sweeping aluminum shafts fused and painted polychromatically with enameled colors and simulated metallic sprays. Planes intersect, sometimes on a central axis, at other times on a cantilevering incline. They question standard notions of horizontality and verticality in sculpture as they thrust out in oblique angles and lateral directions. Their arrangement into parts is often so dynamic in its force upon the eye's trajectory, that the underlying conservatism of the work is often overlooked.

While Schroder, Toth and Burnley share similarities with the Constructivists of this century, Schroder is, in my opinion, the Mannerist's Constructivist. He has a predilection for asymmetrical compositions and diagonal lines. His poised and stylistically sleek extensions strongly imply motion. Even the self-conscious use of color is elegant in its expression. Schroder is a formalist, but also a stylist who renounces volume in favor of achieving an illusion of velocity. As if analogous to a model of a splitting atom, Schroder's reliefs exemplify the energy unharnessed by the annihilation of mass.

By contrast, the work of John Toth and Gary Burnley has a mass value. John Toth's wooden sculpture, whether displayed in the round or attached to the wall, displaces space rather than articulating or surrounding it as do Schroder's expansive sectors. The lucid articulation of direction is also less defined than Schroder's, due primarily to the multiple centers of line which Toth has organized and materialized with strips of wood.

Toth's multiple centers are characterized by ribbed patchworks which form oblique and acute angles, almost resembling piano keys in their ordered intervals and scale. Unlike Schroder's work, these constructions do not soar off into space. The diverging staccato rhythms of these embrasures trace a dissonant array of movement in form. If focused upon any series of parallel lines, the eye is allowed no more than a minute acceleration or de-acceleration of its itinerary, though it is given the pleasure of traveling over a maze of turns and the opportunity of selecting among numerous alternative routes. The abrupt beginning and end of each line does not allow for any momentum to build, as if Toth feared losing control over his modest intervals of negative space. The alterations of direction, the regulated intervals, the conjunctions of line and the negation of space and surface color all mark the high degree of logic to which Toth subjects his work.



John Toth
S-S 1, 1980 (two views)
Polychromed wood
42" x 36"
Courtesy of the artist

Patterned from life, their designs are derived from observations that Toth makes about clothing – specifically about the vest. Toth is fabricating a vest of many colors which folds, pleats and pockets space when at rest. But the amount of space is not generous. Even the freestanding vests do not expand into the space afforded them. They tend to retain their "reliefness," as if they wanted to hug the wall. If they were not marked by a double countenance, each face an approximate reverse of the other, Toth's intentions might signal the painter's urge to impose a limiting flatness upon the infinitude of space itself.

The consolidating form and weight of Toth's sculpture, of course, prevent any such spatial circumscriptions. Toth is utilizing mass. As much as he may try to denature this mass by painting its wooden surfaces, Toth never escapes the pure volume and ballast which it affords.

Many of the works in this exhibition have been linked together because of their analogous display of unharnessed energy. Energy has its conservative state as

Gary Burnley
Installation View, 1979
Della Robbia glaze on hydrostone
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the Holly Solomon Gallery

well. Right up until the present century, the entire structure of physics was grounded upon two supposedly inviolable laws of nature: (1) The law of the conservation of matter and (2) The law of the conservation of energy. Together these laws state that neither matter, nor energy can be either created or destroyed, and that the two are not interchangeable. Of course Einstein's theories of relativity changed all of that by demonstrating mathematically the continuum of energy and mass. One would never know that this continuum existed from simple observations in nature. Energy and mass simply appear as separate occurances and for centuries had been demonstrated as such by the finest minds.

Arlen, Suzuki, Rankin and Smith implicate systems of energy transference (light might alter into electricity, or heat might convert into motion) as will be demonstrated later. Koebbeman and Schroder go even beyond this by implicating models of mass energy transference (a thoroughly nuclear affair) where sculptural mass appears as if it were to convert into high frequency force – an amazing notion even today. These artists embody the energized metaphor in sculpture.

With all of this alteration and conversion going on around it, it is no mystery why Burnley's spherical masses seem so uniform, self-contained and tranquil. Whether his painted spheres appear to be at rest or in motion, they give the impression of having a sustained harmony; a harmony which prevails in an unfashionably Aristotelean or Newtonian cosmology. The Constructivists' attitude is apparent in respect to the curvature of lines and surfaces and the interplay between sculpture and painting. However, the orderly and ideal world which he fabricates and depicts is also close in attitude to the Suprematists' search for a higher, purer reality.

Burnley has created an important dialectic between sculpture and painting. Carrie Ricky, in one of the most enthusiastic reviews of her career, has summed up Burnley's contribution to the painting/sculpture marriage: ". . . most paintings are about the depiction of a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, while Burnley's are about the depiction of a two-dimensional space on a three-dimensional surface."[3]

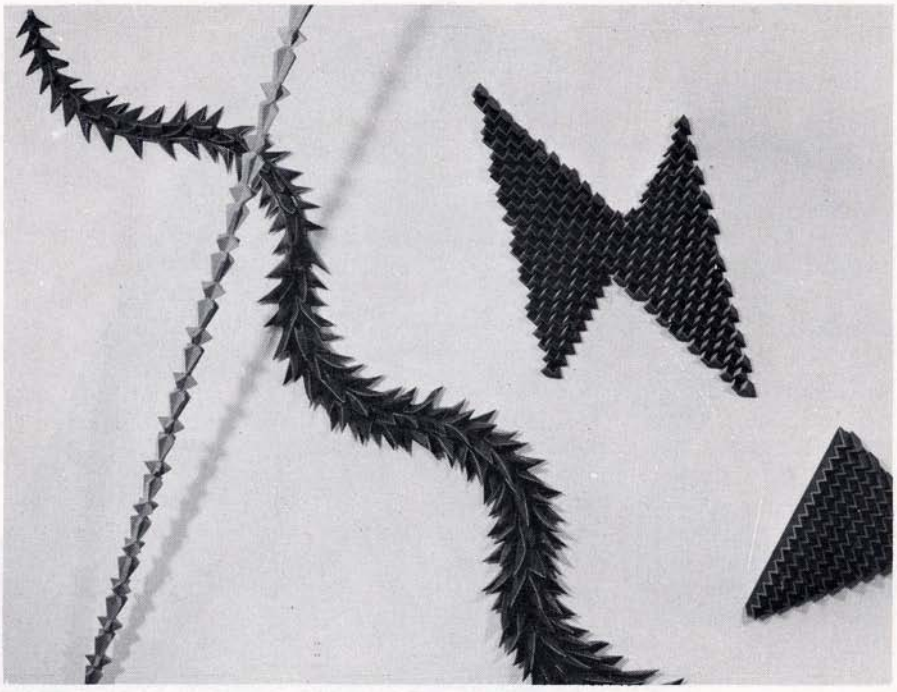
Using Della Robia Glazes, Burnley, like Toth, Koebbeman and Schroder, denatures his material by applying color to his hydrostone surfaces. His colors are painted on in elliptical bands, circles, lines and quadrangles. Colors, shapes and lines may have abrupt beginnings and ends, but they never jeopardize the existing equilibrium maintained within each.

Arranged together in configurations on the floor, they would be as celestial as planetary conjunctions, except for their earthly resignation to gravity. Fortunately this resignation is graceful and mature. Burnley knows the most appropriate place for his materials and does not undermine their clarity with contrived supports.

If we take Burnley entirely too seriously, we will be ignoring their other associations which promise to be more fun. While they do evoke noble comparison with worlds without catastrophe, they are also subject to a certain gameliness. Their shapes and often their contoured lines remind one of beach balls, soccer balls, basket balls and croquet balls.

Koebbeman foresakes order and logic in favor of agitation and irascibility. His sculptures have a defensive character about them – a very appropriate disposition considering the volitile hostilities and aggression in the world. Like R.M. Fischer's personified lamps, Tom Butter's animal, vegetable and mineral ambiguities and Nancy Arlen's biomorphic contours, Koebbeman's painted and wooden serrated bodies, part of a series which he calls "Energies," quiver, throb and seethe with life. It is a highly sensitive life form evoked – almost prehistoric. Some appear to be vertebrate, others invertebrate. All are marked by protective armor which often shields a sensitive, flaccid interior. This armor does more than protect, it cautions against an attack.

The wall reliefs are another matter, however. A newer series which Koebbeman has named "Synergies" (synergy being the combined action of discreet elements), demonstrate a more controlled pattern of color and shape. Where the older, more biomorphic forms evoke a spontaneous energy, the newer wall patterns create a sense of harnessed, utilized energy. This energy is so controlled that its primary function is as an optical effect of vibrating pattern and color. When the two types of work are exhibited together in the same space, they mimic nature with its disparate frequencies.

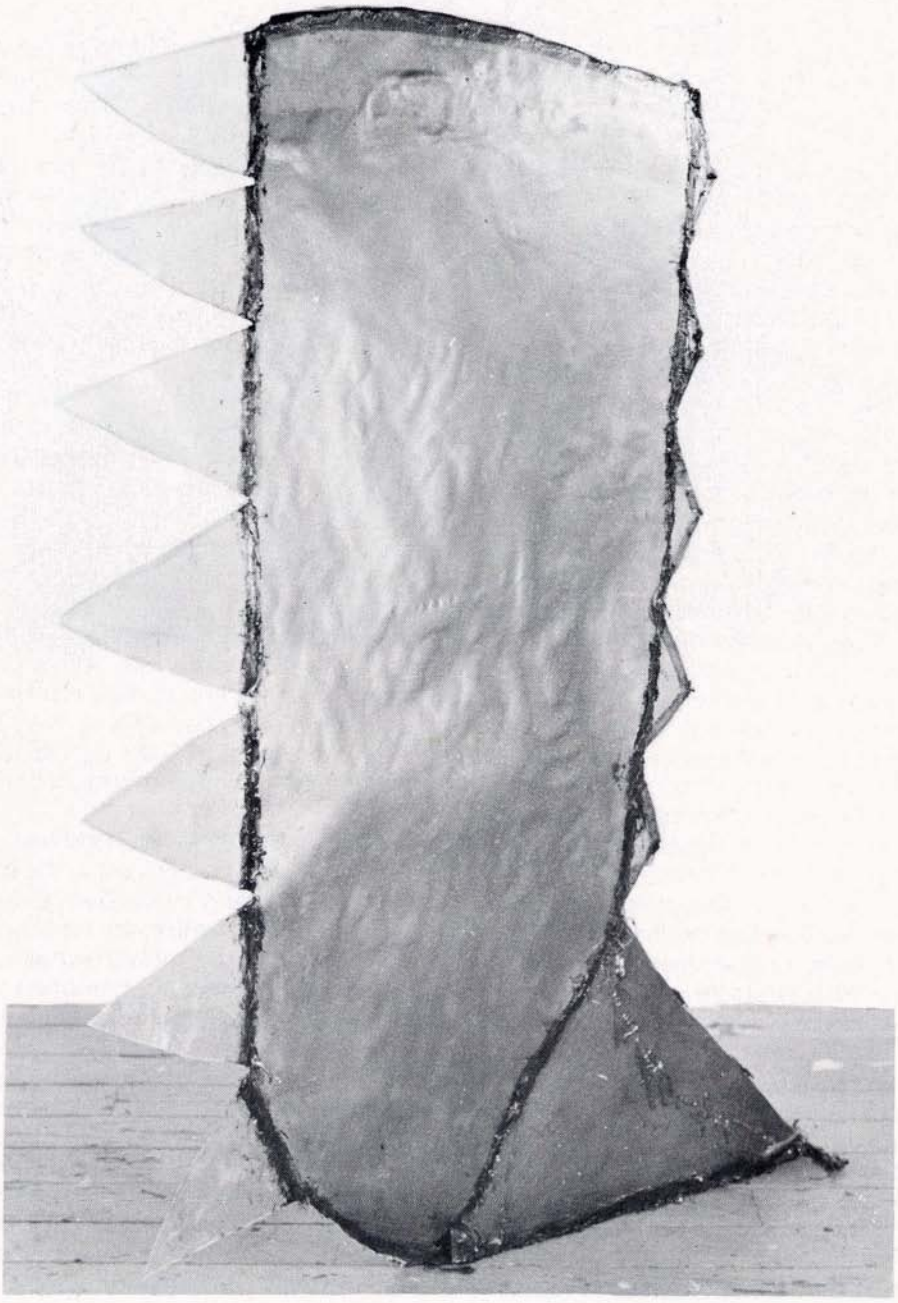


Skip Koebbeman
Energies and *Synergies, 1979-80*
Painted wood
Dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist

The capacity of a given thermodynamic system to "work" is known as its "free energy" and that energy unavoidably lost as heat is known as "entropy." The entire body of Koebbeman's work illustrates how mass and color combine to function as metaphors for these systems. Like electricity, magnetism, motion and light, all of which work while expelling heat, Koebbeman's sculptures "work" to dispel space, describe motion and absorb and reflect light while expelling a psychologically caustic ambience. Whether the entropy of these visual effects is harnessed, as in the "Synergies," or spontaneous, as in the "Energies," all act as fixed fires in a mental space.

Nancy Arlen and Tom Butter use light to investigate matter. Arlen's polyester ter resins and Butter's fiberglass cloth, are shaped into forms which contain varying degrees of translucency and opacity. These properties extend the mass of sculpture by bestowing it with an active relationship with light. In forming mass out of translucent materials, both Arlen and Butter are negating the substance of mass. Translucency undermines the opaque volume of conventional sculpture by allow-

Nancy Arlen
untitled, 1980
Cast polyester
16" x 10" x 4"
Courtesy of the artist



Tom Butter
S.T., 1980
Fiberglass-polyester resin
25" x 50" x 3"
Courtesy of the artist

ing the transference of light and its spectral manifestations to replace solidity, opacity and volume as the most fundamental qualities of sculpture. Characteristic of Arlen's work in particular is the refraction undergone by light as it is directed upon the physical form.

Arlen's translucent reliefs do not obstruct light nor do they cast as dense a shadow as do most solid forms. Instead, her work deflects rays of light, registering its emission through the polyester substance by projecting a patch or aura of colored light upon the wall acting as the form's support. Though negated, both Arlen and Butter have fabricated an active mass; active because of mass's function as a conduit of light rather than merely as a receptacle of it. Mass has the function of inducing color in a space-time context, but it can do this only when it actively engages with light.

Because each work's temperament is so emphatically dependent upon the kinds of light emitted, especially in Butter's case, where the translucency and opacity within each work is varied, the work takes on a temporal importance lacking in most sculpture which does not actively engage with light. Butter speaks of his work as either passively "dissolving" under light or as assertively "resisting" light, depending on the kind of light emitted. By investing their work with a light-conditional temperament, Arlen and Butter are outwardly implicating the dimensions of time, and hence, reflexively demonstrating the space-time continuum.

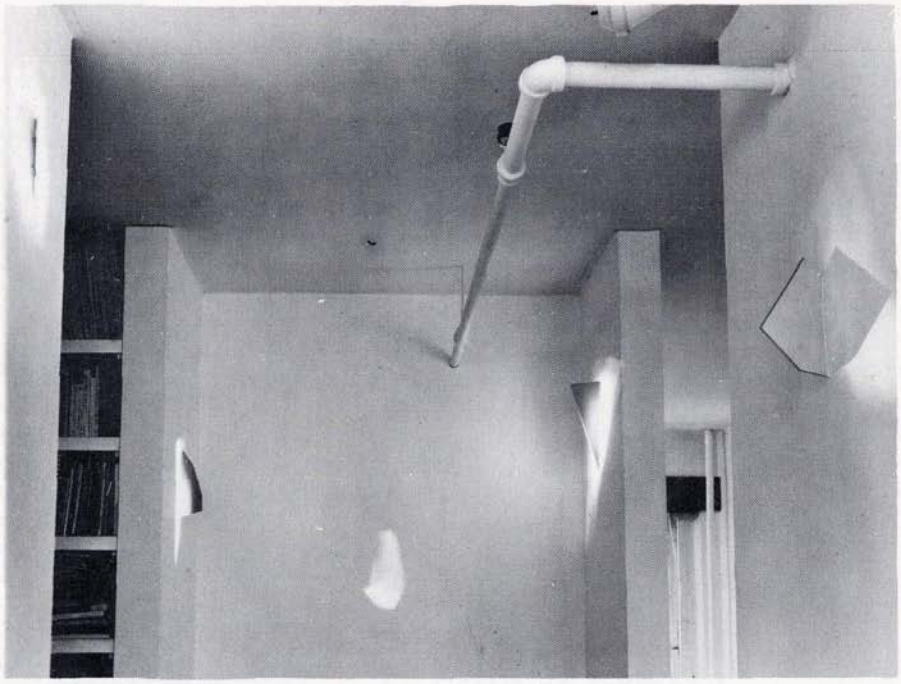
All sculpture by definition must have mass and form, and Arlen's and Butter's light-conducive sculptures are no exception to this deductive rule. Although at times both may share a similar approach to form, they have entirely different sensibilities when delegating the nature of mass. Both have fabricated aggressively ambiguous shapes out of entirely different volumes. As shapes, they are capricious in their raison d'être. The question may even arise as to whether these forms are animal, vegetable or mineral.

While Arlen is essentially concerned with a mass that is easily installed upon the wall, Butter's masses, as light weight as they are, remain reverent to the authority of the physical laws of gravitation by simply submitting to the floor. Arlen is more defiant. She attempts to prevent the centrifugal and centripetal forces from limiting her masses' levitational powers. I would enjoy viewing her work while in the weightless reaches of outer-space, a region where she could no doubt relax her dependency upon the wall-as-support while measurably underlining her work's humor.

Weightlessness and negation of mass also mark Taro Suzuki's new work, not by mere metaphor, however, but by the virtual absence of mass. Although Suzuki does employ an architecture of colored mirrored planes, the active medium engaged is as much light as it is mass.

Colored mirrors are appended in clusters to walls, ceilings and floors. They are positioned in such a way that light from a single source (usually incandescent) is reflected at varying angles and lengths of space. They occupy a "cornered" space where they are so discreet as to be almost unnoticeable by themselves. Without this "cornering" of space, Suzuki could never actively engage the reflection of light with its property of traveling through space in straight lines.

A single beam of light is emitted and directed so that it strikes the first in a series of colored mirrors. The second mirror is of a different geometric shape and color than that of the first, as are all the successive mirrors different in shape and color from



Taro Suzuki
Wild Weasals, 1980
Mirrored plexi
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the Stefanotti Gallery

those which precede them. Like a painter, Suzuki uses primary colors and blends them together. He differs from painters in his approach to mixing color by using entirely different principles; those of light, rather than principles of colored substance. When a rebounded colored light strikes a mirror of another color, the two colors synthesize into a third. Suzuki is illustrating the dialectical properties of the color wheel in space before our very eyes. The final effect is a reflected color which has been projected upon the bare white wall. Its light seems to vibrate as it casts traces of the shape of the last mirror to reflect the light.

Suzuki's name for this angled setup is the "Single Beam Cluster." Discreet and elegant, Suzuki has ingeniously designed a work of art which conserves the energy of light. By taking into consideration the need for only one light source along with its characteristic of being compact enough to be transported without any substantial expense, Suzuki has fabricated an aesthetic model for the future of art. His installations are both pragmatic and convenient in their design and execution. It serves as the perfect model for Nam June Paik's projection of the future art form; an art form which must minimalize expense if it is to exist amid the perpetual decline of energy resources.[4]

More than any other artist in the show, Suzuki's work can be playfully thought of in a conceptual context. For example, if the central lighting of Suzuki's work were to be shut off, the work, or at least the work's perceptual and cognitive manifestations would be no more. The transient character of the work is determined by the duration of time in which the light remains on or off. When off, the work dissolves from physical space-time and exists within the space-time of memory alone, or not at all, depending upon how one would have it. As long as its skeleton remains intact, it can be both perpetual and transient, a matter which is contingent entirely upon the volition of those in control (of the gallery, the home, or the corporate commission).

Without having experienced the work with its fixed beam of light, a realization of the work's potential "artness" cannot at all be had simply by observing the position of the mirrors. It is this beam, along with its rebounding relationships and its color-producing capacity that enables the work to be perceived. Turn the beam on and we have art; turn it off and we don't. Suzuki's materiality of sculpture is only structural and functional. As contingent as his work is upon these structural and functional components, it is not a combination of these components alone which creates the gestalt we call art. The gestalt is assumed only after the beam of light is projected upon these components and crystallizes them in a spatially occupying form which we call sculpture.

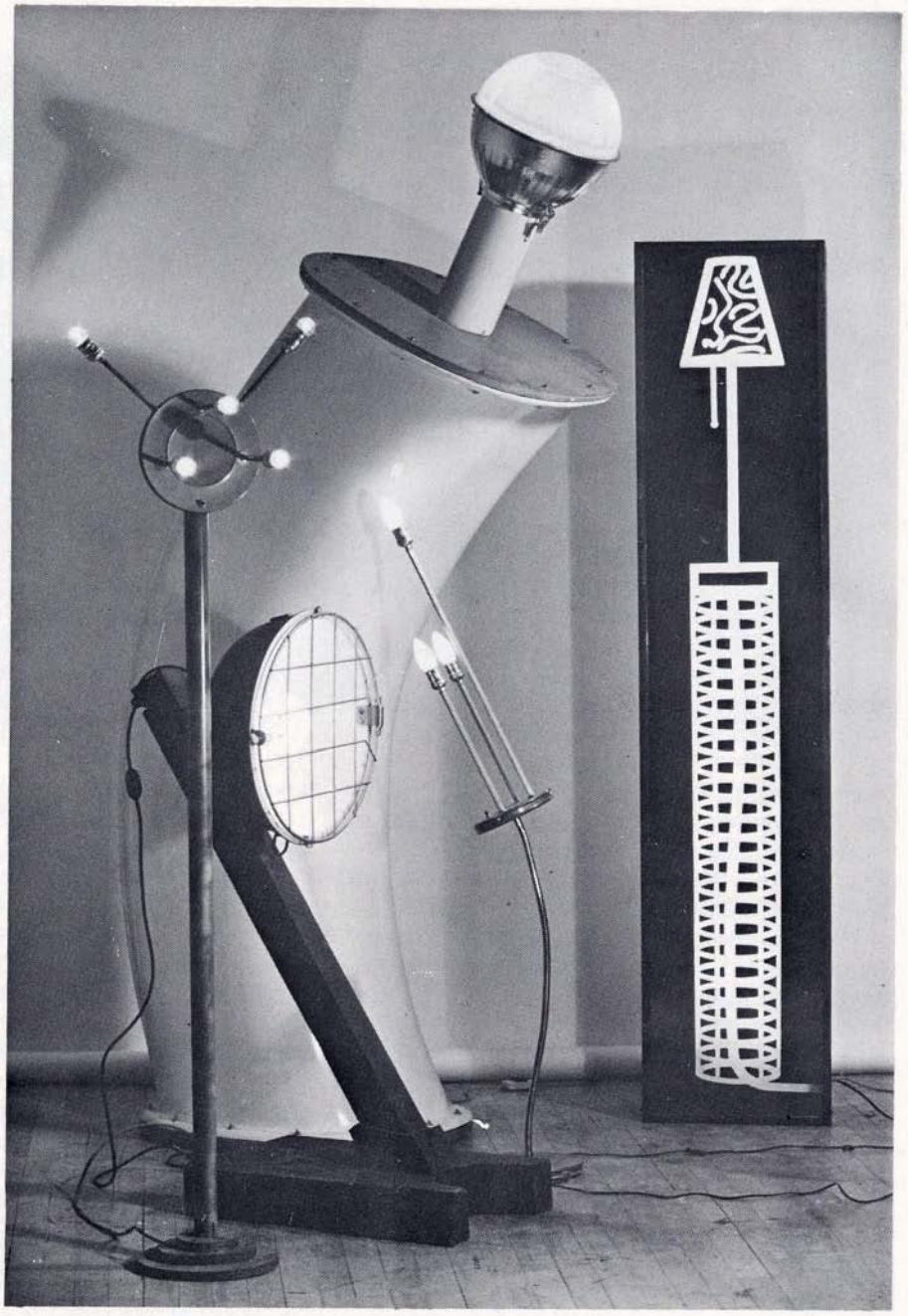
While considering light as one of the unifying themes of this show, R.M. Fischer's lamps might be among the first bodies of work to come to mind. Due to our pedestrian awareness of light, especially those of us who might be nocturnally inclined, we tend to associate the concept of "light" with that of "lamp" more readily than with "color" or "mass" or "sculpture." After all, as inhabitants of the twentieth century interior we all expend energy by switching on the "light" (while meaning, of course, the "lamp").

Ironically, however, no matter how much one might scrutinize the relationship of light to Fischer's work, it is difficult to regard light as a medium of central importance. One might regard the function of light as being Fischer's raison d'être, if judging his lamps solely upon the merit of their utilitarian capacities. Fischer does, in fact, regard their function as being of importance.

Fischer's lighting does make psycho-sociological implications, as has light throughout the history of the human race. Since the first fire, mankind has worked to produce light for pragmatic as well as ritualistic purposes. Endowed with an unlimited imagination which is suggested to be collective at its biologically structural source, mankind has universally personified this light. The wacky yet often dignified personifications of Fischer's lamps hardly depart from this imaginative urge. The only difference is that Fischer is personifying lamps and not light.

The "personal appearance" of Fischer's lamps underlines his intentions. "Packaging," as a definitive term borrowed from the world of advertising and used in regard to Fischer's work, would not in any way vulgarize or disproport his intentions. The "package" fabricated by Fischer directly illustrates to what degree he has bestowed his design with a reflexive and articulate outlook on the not-so-parallel worlds of the market-at-large and the market for art.

By endowing his lamps with physical characteristics normally regarded as aggressive, bad taste, kitsch, camp or junk (all outside of art-contexts, of course?),



R.M. Fischer
*Mouse Lamp, 1980,*52" high
Salon Lamp, 1980, 48" high
Elbow Macaroni Lamp, 1979, 98" high
*Future Tadpole Lamp, 1979,*52" high
Light Box II, (Aluminated Graphic), 1979, 84" high
by Ronell Productions

Fischer feigns a fashionable naiveté. Appearances aside, however, he has matured in an age when popular culture has reached an unprecedented proportion as a determining force in peoples' lives. "Low art," forms such as television, movies, current literature, rock, pop, soul and disco music are all art forms which make appeals to the libido's desire for thrills or for sentiment. There is a collective hedonism prevailing in pop culure today, as the industry perpetually fuels our expanding demands to be entertained.

The seventies in particular had been characterized by a blend of nostalgic marketing, thrift shop sensibilities and a fashionably chic raw industrial look in the decorative arts. Fischer has made use of all these off-beat market demands and has synthesized them into imaginative renditions of a slightly nostalgic, slightly futuristic, low technocratic display. "Nostalgic futurism" is a brand of cultural synthesis which has recently been favored by a number of artists to characterize their work, of whom Fischer, Rankin and Smith are but a few. Sci-fi flicks from past decades such as "Flash Gordon," "The Time Machine" and "The War of the Worlds," with their Hollywood-Kitsch renditions of futuristic technology, stylistically embody the sources from which this brand of nostalgia has arisen.

Having gone on record as insisting that formalism was "a high order of conversation not unlike scientific language[5]," Fischer's own formalistic conversations are a radical departure from the increasingly streamlined "high-tec" predilections predominating in today's architectural, industrial and mercantile designs. Westinghouse and General Electric are not used as models to be emulated but as rivals with which to compete. As a marketed product, Fischer's lamps offer a serious alternative to the "form follows function" credo prevalent today.

As adept as his comprehension of marketing and advertising is, Fischer's flirt with technology and the decorative arts reveals a conflict of emotions which also marked past critics of modernization such as the Dadaists. Like Rankin and Smith, Fischer does not seem entirely at home in the world of objective phenomena despite all of his attempts, but then one would not expect this in view of the subjectivity of his formalism. Despite this conflict, however, Fischer has been able to extend art further toward the interface separating it and the mass market than has any other artist since those of the Bauhaus. His lamps are being slowly assimilated into the marketable world, having appeared in such venturesome department store windows and displays as New York City's Bloomingdales, Fiorucci's, Art et Industrie and Chicago's Korshaks'.

Fischer validates this assimilation in a statement issued by Ronell Productions, a collaborative firm established by Fischer and Elliot Wertheim, a sales and promotional agent. He states that art "must be de-mystified enough to allow it to be believed and accepted." He claims that this can be achieved, in addition to its assimilation into the market-at-large "by supplying additional information about it through a system which mirrors the larger political system." This political system might not be easily mirrored, however. The degree of subjectivity to which he submits his lamp designs simply cannot be cost-effective, at least not at this time. This factor alone is enough to prevent their emergence into a mass-distribution market which he is intent upon entering. Fischer may have the direct commitment to industrialize merchandise, but his designs lack the economy that marked the Bauhaus artists. (The Bauhaus artists' failure at being assimilated into the market-at large was due

Tom Rankin
untitled, 1981
Polyvinyl chloride
42 ½" x 20" x 10"
Courtesy of the artist.

more to the cost of the available means of production at the time rather than to any inherent lack of economic design). Fischer does succeed in providing a rare product which acts as an interface between a technologically rendered art form and the everyday habitation of life. Perhaps the only way an artist can successfully achieve this interface is by positioning his or herself in the conflicting stance in which Fischer now stands.

Tom Rankin's sculptures are sometimes made of metallic materials. Those in this exhibition are made from polyvinyl chloride and wire. They are even more ambiguously rendered than are Fischer's, whose lamps at least have utilitarian certainty, or Smith's, whose work can be understood metaphorically from both political and literary premises. Rankin's work enjoys no such clarity.

They are conventional as sculptural works in their construction of mass, yet their stylistic introduction of light and color as psycho-sociological devices gives them

claim to an innovation of extensions into a more perceptual/mental space. The oblique angularity of their shapes contributes to this mental extension as well, and when combined with color and light they act as emblematic devices. This is particularly unique when considering light's function as a designator of meaning.

Like Arlen and Butter, Rankin's most translucent polyvinyl chloride masses absorb light and are activated by it. "Solar-activated" might be a more appropriate term, for when displayed within the direct rays of the sun, the entire mass seems to generate power and levitate from the base on which it lies. In this way Rankin's sculpture can be seen as being even more than an emblematic designator of meaning. It can be regarded as a demonstration of that meaning, in this case of systems of power. Solarization as an alternate means of harnessing energy has been advocated for nearly two decades now, but rarely has it been utilized as an artistic force.

The question comes to mind when approaching the work of either Gib Smith or R.M. Fischer (for wholly different reasons): When do art and technology merge? "Pure" technology is the building of machines for their own sake and for the aesthetic of its accomplishment. It has occupied a place in Western mankind's classifications between art and science. Some examples of "high" pure technology: the record breaking sports car, designed purely to achieve a new precedent; the computer chess game, designed for pure entertainment; the aerodynamic model rocket which roars to new heights, designed purely to be tried in competition.

The usual attitude taken toward pure technology in our culture is predominantly negative. Aside from the host of engineers and junior-Poindexters who perpetuate these pure designs, most people place its value only on its pragmatic or profitable consequences.

Likewise, there are few noticeable painters or sculptors today who come close to bridging the gap between art and technology (pure or otherwise) into their aesthetic concerns. Certainly there are no schools or movements to compare with the Futurist or Bauhaus artists. Those artists who do gravitate toward technology are the ones who use it directly as a medium: performance artists, musicians, video artists, filmakers and photographers. But many current painters and sculptors remain anachronistically aloof from even a metaphoric reference to higher technology.

Some artists, such as the current members of New York's Collaborative Projects or Fashion Moda, are indulging in political and sociological concerns. Many others are either inherently involved with personalized psychological references or formal concerns. Recently a number of artists (R.M. Fischer, Scott Burton, Cindy Sherman, Lynda Benglis, Robert Longo, and Richard Prince, to name only a few) have "specialized" their focus upon the interface between art and the culture-at-large, concentrating upon a context including art, fashion and the decorative arts. By contrast, investigations of the interface between art and technology made by young painters or sculptors are rare. Technology seems to be more within the realm of video, performance and the Conceptualists' oeuvre, than within the concerns of current painters or sculptors.

Relevant to this topic, Jack Goldstein's latest aerospace paintings are the exception. By bravely capturing the close association between militarism and pure tech-

nology in conventionally air brushed pictorialism, Goldstein is depicting the politics of a fascist aggression which is found both within a militarist-technocratic minded race and within nature itself.

Gib Smith chooses to place himself in this literary arena, but with a form radically different from Goldstein's. Along with Fischer, Smith complements, even supplants his personal aesthetic with a cultural view of aesthetics. More like Goldstein, however, Smith is fascinated by aerodynamic vehicles which travel at enormous speeds, the discharge of high concentrations of energy and the move to "conquer" space. Perhaps this is not as naive as it may sound in such simplistic terms. After all, the world's militaristic forces lurk behind the funding of all aero- and outer space endeavors.

Smith's Power for Peace tables naturally have their specific time references. Their laminated kidney shaped table tops, sleek legs and coaster feet are timelessly "atomic" and "Eisenhowerean." Slightly inclined rather than at a horizontal level, they transcend their utilitarian function and do so to suggest great velocity and pressure.

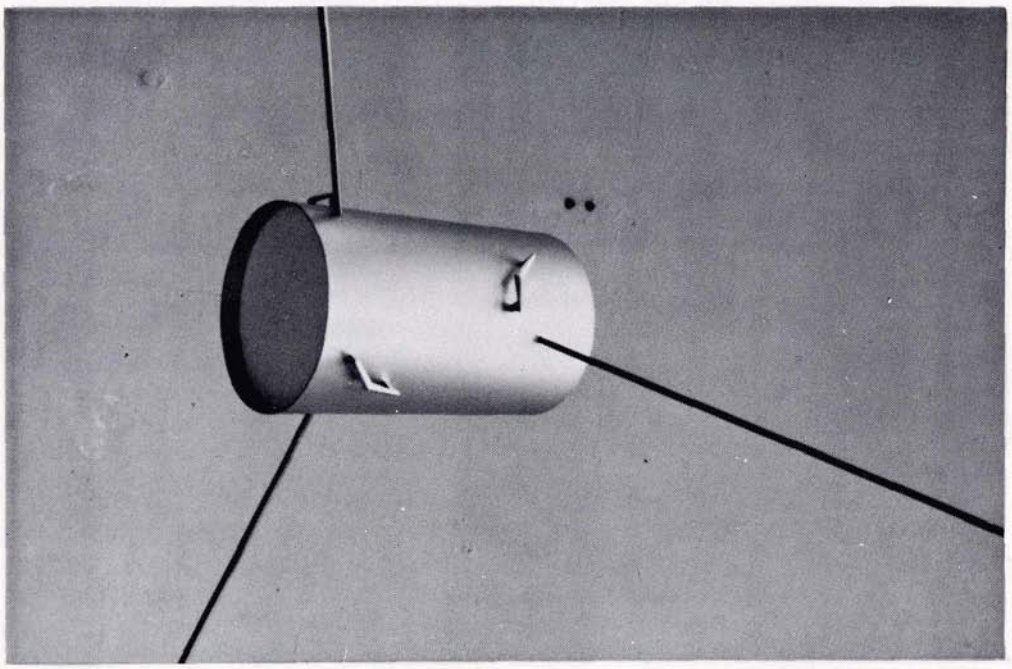
Laminated on the top of "Power For Peace II" is a constellation of fighter jets against a wild blue yonder (the wild blue is really closer to a cerulean). Smith is addressing an audience which is primarily unsympathetic to the military's aggrandizement of human ingenuity and design. If presented within the culture at large, they may offend, even assault certain viewers. Like Fischer's lamps, Smith's tables beg for promotion in a mass market, yet their promotion is negated by their own insistance upon confrontation.

If this mass distribution were to be achieved, the irony of such a distribution would be lost, but an entirely new credibility would be gained. Imagine the implications. Militaristic furniture sold at franchise stores could act as a playful subversion of the military complex. On the other hand, as a military strategy designed by the Pentagon, Smith's tables, mass-produced, might serve to reinforce the public's now unstable faith in the need for defense. What better way to induce the artificial need of an escalating arsenal.

Smith's "Leisure Satellites" act as bantering embodiments of the twentieth century's technological achievement par excellence the space flight. Rocketry, satellite stations, radar and long distance communications represent pure technology at its most experimental, most sensitively designed and most expensive phase. Made of plastic laminate and aluminum, Smith's satellites aren't so much kitsch as they are elegant parodies of a more sophisticated space technology.

As with Fischer and Rankin, materials are thoroughly calculated to emulate a certain utilitarian prototype. Smith goes one step further by mimicking a politically and economically powerful prototype. Such a prototype implicates a host of cultural ideas, particularly the contemporary industrial civilization itself.

However unintentional, by entitling his satellites "Leisure Satellites," Smith is evoking the philosophy of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse posits that by increasing the needs and satisfactions of a given civilization, an administration can effectively hamper that civilization's liberation from repression. "The distinguishing feature of an advanced industrial society is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation; liberation also from that which is tolerable and rewarding and com-



Gib Smith
Leisure Satellite II (detail), 1980
Aluminum
12" x 18" w/42" extensions
Courtesy of the artist

fortable while it sustains and absolves the obstructive power and repressive function of the affluent society[6]."

With regard to this viewpoint, Smith's "Leisure Satellites" act as satirical auguries of a time in mankind's future when technological and militaristic advances are achieved at the expense of humanistic needs. Smith seems to suggest that rather than cater to humanity's need directly, the military-industrial complex will buffer the unfulfilled populace by supplying technological comforts such as space-cruises and vacations for two in other planetary orbits.

From a historical perspective, the ten artists represented here have firm roots in one or more of the major schools and movements of art prior to their own births. Cubism, Constructivism, Bauhaus, Futurism, Fauvism, Suprematism and Dada were all revolutionary because of the particular inquiries which they made into the perceptual-physical correlations of events. Color, light and mass in this century have become conceptualized as perceptual constants of the human nervous system, but inferred from the world of physical facts. With this physical and epistemological groundwork set early in the century, systems of art oscillated between the subjective values of personal, perceptual-psychology and the objective, constant values of physics.

R.M. Fischer has pointed out, as have countless artists before him, that the artist's vision cannot "occupy a closed system." Though it cannot be closed, it can be cyclical. New perceptual and physical developments arose from an insatiable curiosity about specific relationships. These relationships involve the correlation of perceptual knowledge with the occurance of things in the physical world. Some of these correlating occurances are described in terms of color, light and/or mass. Based upon massive amounts of empirical research into these occurances, combined with mathematically inductive/deductive calculations, new inferences are founded. These new inferences are then formalized into "scientific" paradigms and systems. Each system has its own particular language. This language allows for a communication of common ideas about these systems to the scientific and technocratic elite. The technocratic elite in particular applies this language by creating a new pragmatic and (in most cases), cost-effective device. This device is then assimilated into the cultural market place. Artists shop in this market place. They buy materials and they buy books. They assimilate ideas from both these resources and use these resources to nurture new ideas of their own. Some of these ideas are formalistic, while others are cultural in their content. Some of these formalistic and/or cultural ideas are about color, light and mass, or at least they have proven to be so by the artists represented here.

NOTES

1. Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge, It's Scope and Limits, Simon and Schuster, 1976 reprinted, 1948, pp. 207-208.
2. For a general overview on the music/art interface, see Michael Shore, "Punk Rocks the Artworld," Art News, volume 79, no. 9, November 1980, pp. 78-85. For many of the artists included in this exhibition, an important article to consult is by Ronny H. Cohen, "Energism: An Attitude," Artforum, Volume 19, no. 11, September 1980, pp. 16-23.
3. Carrie Ricky, "Reviews," Artforum, Volume 18, no. 6, February 1980, pp. 95.
4. Nam Jun Paik, "Random Access Information," Artforum, Volume 19, no. 11, September 1980, pp. 46-49.
5. John R. Friedman, Joanne Barkan, "Ron Fischer's Lamp Sculptures," Arts, Volume 54, no. 10, June 1980, pp. 101-105.
6. Herbert Marcuse, The New Forms of Control, Beacon Press, 1964, Chapter One.