

Don Snell's three sculptures at A.C.T. seem engaged in a father-son dispute with the generation of Carl Andre. In his previous exhibition at A.C.T., Snell dramatized the placement of wooden beams by underpinning and overlapping beams in dynamic shapes that were their own structure. In the recent work, the artist seems to be asking what new can be done with timber beams that is not determined by their own form or materiality. If sculpture generally is an equation between material and structure (that attains a balance or weights itself differently on one or the other term), Snell disbalances the equation by the introduction of rope as the means of organizing the arrangement and keeping it rigid. Now the work is arranged not constructed since the artist abandons the nature of the material as the form of organization. Some of these works look reasonable without appearing absolutely reasonable in the case they were formed as some logical sequence of beam elements.

The work is thus anti-reductivist since it adds an element that is, in itself, not the material of structure but a binding agent. The rope, however, does not act like a bolt or weld since it leaves each material element -- the separate beams -- distinct. The ropes, elevating beams above any ground support, also add to the feeling of some degree of precariousness, the sense of transience. While the structure is stable, it is returnable to the original state of the materials through dismantling.

Once you accept rope as part of the sculpture, what can be done with it? It can bind beams so that new configurations arise, since the beams do not have to be self-supporting and thus limited in their arrangement. The rope can even divorce the elements completely one from the other to let each beam hover in space as in the work that forms a barrier in the gallery. The rope as line here can form a rhythmic element in itself. It also permits the play of mass and interval between the beams. This work is illustrative of the attempt to distance itself from the sculpture of the sixties which built with standard components. Compare this work to Carl Andre's Crib, Coin, Compound (1965) that similarly acted as barrier but with a completely different logic of structure.

One of the consequences of using rope, though, is that the rope assumes the function of the wooden beams as support. The structure now becomes a result of the support of the points of the beam ends and the tangential ties between beams so that the length of the beam rather acts as a linear element (although it is mass in space) and as something to be arranged. This is apparent in the small sculpture in the front space of the gallery. One beam in each of the triangles is not needed for support. The triangles enclose the space and give the piece a visual confirmation of structure without being the sculpture's support. The scale of this work, although attuned to the human body

and the space of the gallery, does not seem correct for its internal relations.

The exterior piece seems unsuccessful. What is precarious or dynamic in the relation of the beams (in the manner of Serra's prop pieces) is denied by the complication of the rope which necessarily keeps the structure together.

Philip Monk

10th INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE CONFERENCE
at YORK UNIVERSITY

With the conclusion of the 10th International Sculpture Conference "1,500 artist-delegates from all over the world are carrying the news of the Toronto art awakening to art communities everywhere." Whatever news they take back should be superceded by the recognition of the present limitations and possibilities of contemporary sculpture as revealed by four days of talk at York University. Whether this has been accomplished is doubtful due to the nature of the delegates and the questions posed/imposed by the panel discussions.

The days at York were devoted to panel discussions, lectures and demonstrations. Demonstrations were concerned with fabrication techniques, materials and methods. Panels ranged from critical and aesthetic issues to problems of economics, commissions, governments and galleries.

It was the opinion of many that the panel topics imposed rhetorical categories and oppositions on the discussions such as in the panels "Object vs. Phenomenon -- Piece or Process" and "Pictorial vs. Sculptural Space". Many of these imposed false distinctions on recent and contemporary sculpture or were attempts to create discussion or controversy on the part of the organizers. The latter, and the fact (in my opinion) of the out-of-date character of many of these topics, perhaps revealed the lack of sensitivity of the organizers to the critical problems of contemporary sculpture, or the inability of a conference of such nature to be anything but a trade fair or academic gathering. Academic not in the sense of being intellectual, but of being programmatic and unquestioning. For the academics, the forms of sculpture have been established -- modernist in the vein of Picasso's constructivism to David Smith -- and reinforced by the number of government and corporation commissions. It was revealing that only the critics invited to the conference raised questions about sculpture (at least in all sessions I was able to attend). Jack Burnham, for instance, asked why, when during the 70's critics would rather have their hands cut off or typewriters taken away than admit to being formalist, so much formalist sculpture is made today. Rosalind Krauss raised similar points in her lecture on contemporary criticism and in her participation on panels. Robert Pincus-Witten, the sole critic on the panel "Sculpture and Critics -- "Friends or Foes" similarly addressed the audience suggesting that they were artisans rather than artists.