

Mia Westerlund's recent work on exhibition at the Sable-Castelli Gallery plays with the denial of the medium through the visual illusion inherent in the relation of line to mass. These works have more to do with the three-dimensional projection of a drawn perspectival mass than with sculpture as mass qua mass. One wonders whether Westerlund's habit of processing her sculpture through carefully worked perspectival drawings of the pieces directed her to this new work. Her previous sculpture has always treated the surface of the piece as something created and worked like a drawing rather than as an attribute and constituent of sculptural mass.

On first seeing the work as a group one is struck by the effect of a number of sectioned masses presented in a theatrical situation. One wonders where this has been seen before, and, of course, one thinks of Brancusi's sectioned masses but also of Robert Morris's proposal of a sculpture for Ottawa, which was shown as a drawing at the Sable-Castelli Gallery. In this drawing Morris depicted a group, a number of stones, some of which form a figure due to aligned sectional planes. Although Westerlund's pieces do not necessarily form a group, their collective manifestation only heightens the inherent theatricality of each separate piece. In fact, one questions whether these pieces could function individually or outside of the gallery situation. The oxidized copper surfaces applied to the sectional cuts depend for their effect on spotlights and the exaggerated perspectival lines of the mass, and the worked concrete surface would weaken under a more natural light that does not cut a mass in space as clearly as gallery spotlights.

Each of the sculptures is either a squat mass or a tall vertical column constructed of coloured concrete with top sectional planes, individual sides or vertical slots covered with oxidized copper sheeting that has been forced with acid to turn it green. The sharp indentations, often reversing corners, dramatize the mass as does the colour of the green copper, but they do not reveal much about the interior of the mass, although they are probably an attempt to bring the viewer into the work.

The masses are constructed as if seen in a perverse perspective. The orthogonals and planes are often composed opposite to a geometric mass in true perspective: they seem to usurp the power of the solid mass to assert itself. Perspectival distortion of the mass has a number of effects. The dynamism of the mass unbalances its visual stability, as does the visual distortion of the planes which seem to turn in space with the change of all mass. The sharply-angled sectional planes, emphasized by copper sheeting and lighting further direct the viewer to read the piece as a sequence of two-dimensional visual planes suspended in space on the surface of a mass (they tell nothing of the interiority of mass). Due to these visual distortions there is not much incentive actually to move to investigate the piece as a mass in space except out of curiosity. One may approach it, however, to see to what degree the mass separates from the perspectival imposition.

The visual so overwhelms the sculptural that one feels that the means of the sculpture is only to support the surface. Both Westerlund's sculptures and drawings (as drawings and not as studies for sculpture) indicate that she is working with an idea of planer distortion in space rather than working with the medium itself.

Philip Monk

Harbourfront outside (3) Gomes, Gomes, Stokes
Harbourfront inside - Art Bank (1) D. Rabinowitch
Bathurst St. field (5) Stokes, Hutchings, Snell, Czerewko, McLean

Natural wood, treated wood, new wood, used wood, bent wood, thick wood, thin wood, soft wood, hard wood.
Wood on floor, wood on cement, wood on grass.

Private spaces in public places.

Accumulative structures --slats and slats
nails and nails
bolts and bolts

In competition with cranes, slips, ducks, gulls, boats, bridges, open steel hangars, helicopters, and the Monarch Flour Building, wooden structures fare better than sculptures of other materials. Looking definitely man-wrought for pleasure, entrance, contemplation and secret thoughts, Mark Gomes' Untitled Work in two parts (Harbourfront outside) and Louis Stokes' Space Spiral on the Bathurst green, typify most satisfyingly what good sculpture tries to do. While many use simple means for complex results, complex both visually and physically, which engages the viewer and is fun -- Gomes presents his mysteries unerringly, with a very sure hand; Stokes involves his participants in a scale large enough not to be constantly compared to patterns and structures of the past, to Giza and Petra, or to Mt. Robson and Mt. Rundle.

Gomes' Bunker (Is the name part of the fun? Are we supposed to worry about some long gone war?) attracts entrants to a small canted pyramid, slatted, with decorated door posts. Children, dogs, and select grown-ups enjoy the disparate patterns sunlight makes shining through slats onto bodies and the brown daytime floor; moonlight is a nice variant on this, black and white, with the moonlight stripes delineating human or animal forms inside. There is a place for small friendly pyramids but this viewer still yearns for the 20 kilometer square variety.

Untitled work in two parts sits convincingly on the ground, very beautiful and compelling in its simplicity. Treated plywood slopes up, forming a cut-off rectangular pyramid. Two different smaller structures sit inside each half, surrounded by sand. A model dwelling for people? A real dwelling for little people? A treasure storehouse for normal-size people? This is unclear and all right so. Again, I want one for me about a block square, so scale must be thought about some more. Are we to participate, or are we just to look at or in, from some remove?

Louis Stokes' Space Spiral, on the Bathurst green, of bolted redwood strips curving in a spiral maze formation, where the fencing rises from ground level at entrance to higher than life-size at centre, and where the slats alternate horizontally across our vision, forces us, as we walk, to think inward thoughts while our outward horizon gradually disappears, covered over with wood. Space Spiral evokes many of the same emotions ancient labyrinths do. It is an intriguing pleasure.

Stokes' Harbour Spirals (Harbour front outside) is less successful, as the quality of redwood bending runs amok. Circles with splayed feelers are open in different directions. It is too baroque. Dancers have used Stokes' pieces as sets before, but this one irritates the walker/viewer. Should I step over or on all these pieces? Can I look through here? Or not quite? The three gradually subsiding redwood strip arches shown at