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"Toward A New Metaphysics"

Allan Frumkin Gallery

By Robert Pincus-Witten

Whatever metaphysics is, the present, highly meritable group show, is not about such a drift. As to New, that is applied to the work of three young artists, Cynthia Carlsen, William Schwedler and William Wiley, many of whose qualities are easily discernible in earlier accomplishments. This said and done, "Toward A New Metaphysics," is a suggestive exhibition, not only because it is the initial New York exposure of three talented artists, but also because it presents a contemporary option other than bedrock Mini. To have located another viable stream amidst the prevailing *Drang Nach Nul* is to have made, in itself, a contribution. And that this alternative was seen in the work of three malcontents dissatisfied with Mini-Pie in the Sky (with Diamonds) is also, in topical terms, a not so negligible wrinkle.

This trio was neatly seen by John Perrault as interested in "explorations into the nature of appearances, illusions, and the paradoxes of representation." (*Village Voice*, Sept. 28, 1967.) Perrault's assessment is raised on the a *rebours* nature of an exhibition which partly subverts, partly seconds "the Brahmin-like standards of unequivocal plasticity."

To say that these painters are very young is a euphemism camouflaging the derivative elements of their work—but for all that they appear to be a related front, and they deal in fresh sensations. To my view, Cynthia Carlsen is the artist most flagrantly dependent not only upon such well-known figures as Roy Lichtenstein (whose deadpan recreations of patent medicine publicity she turns into portentous Surrealist anagrams about Man's Fate) but also on her former classmate at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, William Schwedler. He, on the other hand, is another kettle. Caught up in the depiction of anti-structural structures, rendered in detached and empirical terms like the blueprints of a drunken Engineer Hartmann, his simple computations are rendered in sensitive variations of isometric perspective. They are diagrams and visual puns argued in terms of landscape painting. Admittedly the lull in Schwedler's sails is still great, despite the crazy stairwells and querulous overweighted counterpoises. He has a Big Scale Problem. The exquisite puns are etiolated in the vast panorama. For this reason I prefer the small objects, flat sculptures of pseudo-technological configuration. Even here Schwedler tends to usurp his spare imagery with "lapses" (?) designed to dramatize or illustrate his competently conceived and obsessively executed items: *viz.*, monkey hair on the backs of things.

William Wiley is an impressive figure even granting that he too is in many aspects of his work a derivative painter. *Captive*, to describe one of his pieces, represents a pyramid chained to the wall of a red room. The link attached to the wall drips blood. A salmon-colored path leads to an unidentified structure in the lower left hand corner. A distant chamber seen in the upper left houses another pyramid. What does it all mean? In part it "means" the color of Baziotes, the dry surface of Magritte, the imagery of Peter Saul plus de Chirico plus H. C. Westermann, which, after having been said, detracts in no way from Wiley's authenticity. *Shark's Dream* displays a concrete-like "shark" fastened to the "ground" (quotation marks because there is no horizon indicated) who spouts "blood" from his "side" and down whose sluice-like "tail" there runs water. "Shark" dreams of his mate, a similar structure seen from another view, painted in a blurred thought-balloon. What this sardonic joke means—"means" within an empirical cause-effect sequence out of Real Life, I cannot say, nor do I care. But I know I like it.

—Robert Pincus-Witten