

"SCULPTURE MAGAZINE"
NEW YORK - 1994

Rome

The star of the fall sculpture shows in Rome was without a doubt the Louise Nevelson retrospective at Rome's Exhibition Palace. Nevelson, who died in 1988 at the age of 87, had less success in Europe than in America, and this show is her first major European retrospective, in spite of her presence in the 1962 Venice Biennale. Nevelson belonged to the '30s and '40s generation of sculptors, and was a symbolic figure in the women's artistic movement. Following in the footsteps of cubist collages, Arp's reliefs and Duchamp's readymades, Nevelson's work brings together these different directions in a unified totality. Relief after relief of painted assembled wooden shapes, usually all one color (black, white or gold) physically and visually fuse the separate elements. As Nevelson stated, "I use action and counteraction, like in music, all the time ... you add or subtract until you feel ... the form, the principle, that something that makes the house stand; that makes you stand." She chose wood because of its inner life and the immediacy she felt it could spontaneously communicate. Her color choices were just as intentional: black was totality, peace, grandeur, the essence of the universe; white was festive, expansive, freedom; gold was the sun, the moon, and their reflections.

Several excellent artists contributed work to an artist-organized group show at the Rispoli Library. Especially interesting were Kim Strommen's woven-steel wire pieces and John O'Brien's painted and inscribed clothing parts. Both are Americans living in Rome. Strommen (who is also director of Rome's Tyler School of Art) weaves, bundles, knots and wraps wire and handcrafted rope, creating transparent anthropomorphic sculptures that are usually hung in groups. These laboriously woven pieces reveal Strommen's search for the unseen and for surprise, ironically found through a long physical and additive creative process. O'Brien, also a writer, directs his message by handwriting on painted and stained antique lace collars and bodices to create delicate and poetic works.

The work of several contemporary Dutch artists was exhibited in Rome galleries last fall. At the Luigi di Sarro Gallery, Petra de Goede showed her small box constructions featuring miniature

photographic installations of Roman historical sights, with symbolic touches such as written words and spirals of brightly colored pigment. De Goede's highly conceptual work links a spiritual sense to a particular place, such as the heat of the Ionian Islands' volcanoes, or the air coming through the center dome of the Pantheon. In contrast, the more mature Dutch artist Lydia Schouten shunned historical references for large psychologically complex installations dealing with alienation, guilt and aggression, often portraying herself in various guises a la Cindy Sherman. One of Schouten's most recent works at the Il Ponte Gallery, *A+B+C+D+E=MOre than the sum of components*, is a circular chandelier with five hanging rubber heads: Schouten as two bald men, a redheaded housewife, a short-haired brunette and a Monroe blonde, each seemingly mentally disturbed. Schouten has always been attracted to the combination of evil and humor.

Eva Lootz, a Viennese artist living in Spain, filled a room at the Spanish Institute Cervantes with her giant, identical "Knots" (1994). This was installation art at its best. Lootz envisions the world as a labyrinth of impossibilities symbolized by the giant knots.

In a group show that accurately reflected the state of Italian sculpture, Sala I Gallery exhibited the work of two generations of Italian sculptors. The minimalist tendencies of the older were repropounded by the younger in a very clean, cold show that makes one miss the color and warmth of U.S. artists such as Mike Kelley. Worth noting among the up-and-coming are Karpuseeler, an Umbrian artist, and Licia Galizia, who works in Rome. Karpuseeler's *Trip* (1994) in painted wood and steel is a philosophical meditation on the ancient philosophers that are so distant in time but so alive in Italian thought. A metal plate reflects a distorted onlooking spectator, similar to details from Dutch Renaissance paintings.

In Galizia's *Configuraton of Change* thin iron curves project out from the wall, drawing lines in space that mutate when moved along a thin copper wall-mounted track.

In the Renaissance building of the Fashion Academy of Rome, the halls and stairways were filled with the works of

Gianni Novak. Although primarily a painter, his whimsical mobile sculptures reflect his research in color and geometric form. Robotlike creatures have kinetic parts in rainbow colors, a recurring aspect of Novak's works.

Sherry Gache