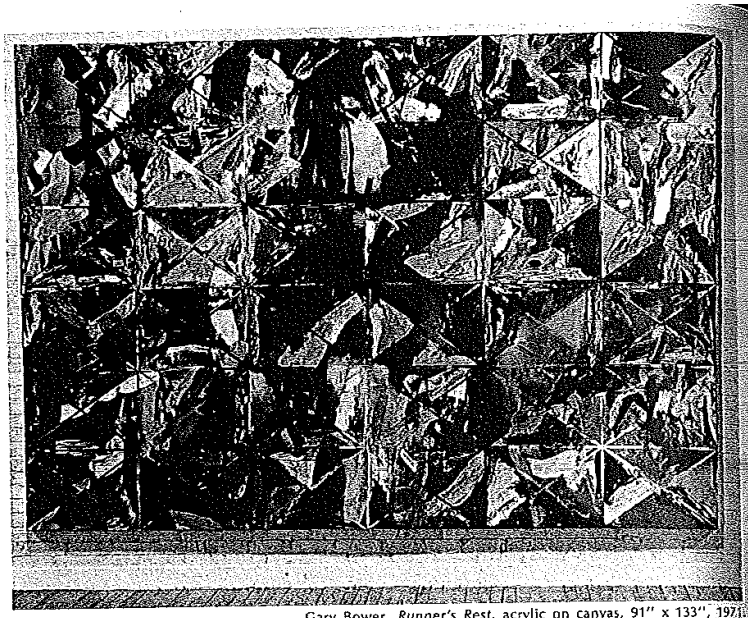
point is not to wage a monthly assault on formalist painting, for the assaults were made quite some time ago, but remarkably, formalist paintings continue to be churned out, which is admirable if you look at it one way, and ridiculous looking at it another way. EDWARD AVEDISIAN's paintings at Elkon repeat the demonstration of formalist paintings' problems, which is essentially that there aren't any. Avedisian's paintings are acrylic patches, dabs, blobs, and Pollockish drips on small (small in terms of how gigantic paintings usually are these days) wood panels in bright fresh colors. However, there is simply nothing else to say about them. What I want to scream is not "isn't anyone out there listening?" but "isn't anyone out there thinking?" Anyway, Avedisian's paintings look very nice, and if that's a virtue, then his paintings are virtuous. Their nongigantic size is something of a relief.

JOHN HOYLAND's paintings at Emmerich downtown are subject to the same nonproblems, but there does seem to be some evidence of thought in his work, and his work can be considered as something of a commentary on these nonproblems. Basically, three sorts of things go on in Hoyland's new paintings: staining and drip-staining which forms the ground of each painting; squeegeed rectangular shapes of thick acrylic; and thick blobs of acrylic which appear to have been splattered against the canvas. Within this methodology, there are, at the extremes, two kinds of paintings. Some of the paintings are an obvious continuation of the strong influence of Hans Hofmann, in which rectangular squeegeed shapes occupy the center of the canvas and move out almost to its edges; in some of these paintings, the shape is an irregular right-angled shape, and in others, a set of overlapping rectangles. Between the edges of the rectangular squeegeed shapes and the canvas are lots of drip-staining and thick blobs of acrylic; in these paintings, most of the action occurs in this area, and this area becomes a kind of pressure zone. The rest of the paintings in Hoyland's show can be considered in terms of these paintings, which are the closest to Hofmann and to Hoyland's earlier work. The other paintings, considered in these terms, present basically the same situation, but the size of the squeegeed rectangular shapes progressively diminishes in relation to the overall size of the paintings. Thus at the other extreme, in 26.8.72 for example, the rectangular shapes are reduced to near obscurity while the staining and blobs take over the whole painting to produce a look similar to the look of recent Poons. By the progressive reduction in the scale relation between the squeegeed shapes and areas occupied by staining and blobs, the pressure zone expands to a point where all sense of pressure is lost. All of the paintings in Hoyland's show have the same kind of coloring, a combination of muted pastel colors dominated by an overall rose color. The most depressing thought about Hoyland's show is the possibility that it represents only the transference of his allegiance from Hofmann to Poons; not that I have anything in particular against Poons, it's just that that doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

Hoyland's show consisted of two kinds of paintings only when considered in terms of the extremes, but there was a middle ground between the extremes so that his paintings could be seen as a progression. However, GARY BOWER's show at O.K. Harris was a case of excluded middle and consisted of two distinct kinds of paintings, which are supposedly not chronologically distinct. Four of Bower's paintings were a continuation of his earlier work based on horizontal-vertical-diagonal grid structures; but the new grid paintings are made of layers of gestural brushstrokes within which the grid of masking tape is laid down and removed so the paintings are, in a sense, all gestural brushstrokes, including the formation of the grids. Portions of the grids are so overwhelmed by so much brushwork as to get lost entirely. Bower's interest in these paintings seems to be in the conflict between the wildness of the brushstrokes within the confines of the rigidness of the grid system, and in the surface tension of the illusion of push-pull, in-out, etc. But an awful lot of other painters seem to be interested in accomplishing the same thing by essentially the same method to such a degree that the accomplishment seems already to have been rather thoroughly accomplished.



Gary Bower, *Runner's Rest*, acrylic on canvas, 91" x 133", 1971

The only connection between Bower's grid paintings and the other four paintings in the show occurs in *Studio Land*, a painting which like the others of its kind are mostly washlike stains on raw cotton canvas, except that in this painting a charcoal drawing of a wire fence forms a horizontal-vertical grid superimposed on the lower two-thirds of the painting. Characteristic of these four paintings are the washes, plenty of raw canvas, and the occurrence of sets of circles filled in with paint. The repeated stenciling of a pair of hands in one of these paintings suggests a getting into mysticism, which when applied to the other nongrid paintings seems to make sense, in terms of the paintings at least. Without the notion of mysticism, these paintings seem thoughtless; within the notion of mysticism, the paintings, from my point of view, seem equally thoughtless, but perhaps this would not be the case for someone more sympathetic to mysticism.

—BRUCE BOICE

ADOLPH GOTTLIEB, Marlborough Gallery; HAROLD BRUDER, Forum Gallery; WILLARD MIDGETTE, Frumkin Gallery; WOLF KAHN, Borgenicht Gallery; LOUISE NEVELSON, Pace Gallery; AGNES DENES, A.I.R.; GIOVANNI ANSELMO, Weber Gallery; RONALD BLADEN, Fischbach Gallery; THOMAS BANG, O.K. Harris Gallery:

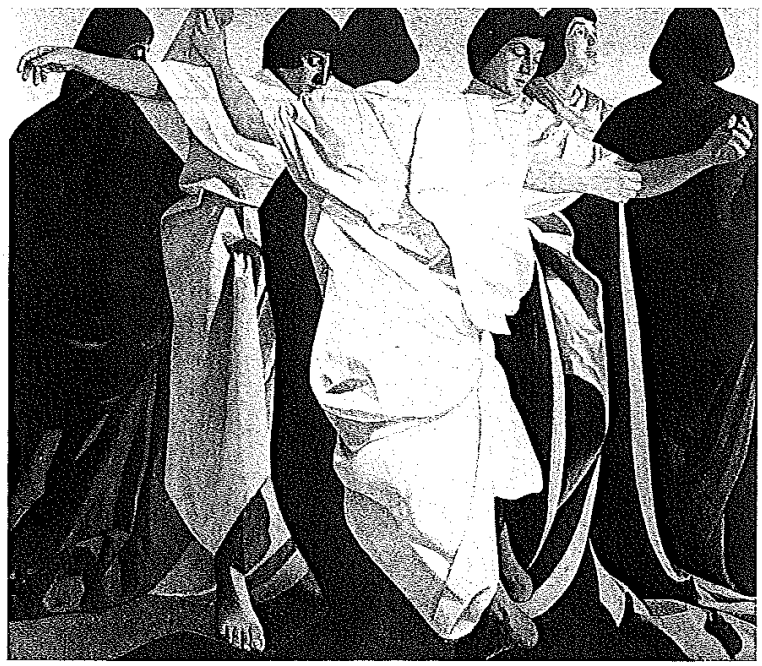
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB's first one-man show in New York since 1967 rounds out the series we've seen this fall of new paintings by major Abstract Expressionists. Despite his recent serious illness his familiar images — the blasts or burst and the imaginary landscape — look stronger than they have in many years. He has even broken with his expected vertical format to create a huge horizontal triptych. The usual system is to bisect the canvas horizontally into broad areas of nuanced ground. He then activates one or both sides of this separation with sky or earth symbols. Gottlieb's retinal color operates to full advantage in configurations which oppose the heat of red, pink, orange, and brown to the tonal temperature drops of black, blue, and gray. Between the figure and the ground he often employs the mediation of a vibrating halo or encircling textured area which simulates the effect of a halo. This pushes the shapes forward and prevents them from making holes in the surfaces. Irregularities around the edges operate similarly. Both occur in *Rising*, which has the delicate synoptical strength of an oriental hanging scroll.

Gottlieb is the only Abstract Expressionist who has attempted to

work with simple object-ground dichotomies. He depends on the opticality of his color, precise placement, and small textural distinctions. Each of his paintings generates the sensation of having coalesced spontaneously into place. Yet when you look over his entire output in a catalogue or a retrospective it seems repetitive. A painting like *Red vs. Blue*, for instance, is amazingly close to *Red, Blue, Yellow* of 1966. The question of Abstract Expressionist improvisation presents a similar problem when a study for a painting by Franz Kline is compared to its large, final version. Practically every drip and dash is identical.

The beautifully painted canvases of Miró seem to have had a direct influence on Gottlieb's work. He added large scale and eliminated complexity, but when his work is seen concurrently with the large Miró show at the Guggenheim Museum their relationship looks very close indeed. If one of the large, late, blue Miró's were shown in the context of his Marlborough exhibition it would surely be taken for a Gottlieb. Of course, there's always the possibility of a reciprocal influence of Gottlieb on Miró which shouldn't be discounted. Of all the Abstract Expressionists, Gottlieb is probably the most connected with the School of Paris.

Some interesting aspects of the handling of subject matter are raised by three exhibitions of representational painting. HAROLD BRUDER is the most problematic of the three artists. His attitude toward the subjects he depicts is abstract. Rhetorical gestures abound, but no specific messages are being conveyed. The paintings recall the work of Puvis de Chavannes — many figures standing about in studied poses dressed in voluminous classical robes but not communicating with one another. In *Celebration*, with figures in dance-like positions, he raises more questions than he answers. We are given no substantial clues to the meaning behind the rituals he depicts, their purpose, or even their era. An interesting compositional device — averting the face of the central figure — serves to deepen the mystery. He minimizes the hierarchical focus on this figure and equalizes the allover interest of the painting. The figures exist in an indefinite, friezelike spatial plane that almost feels as though it lies in front of the picture plane. The sensations of volume created by the massive draperies are held in check by an overall bland tonality which is interrupted only occasionally by areas of Poussin-like primaries, abstractly deployed.



Harold Bruder, *Celebration*, o/c, 54" x 64", 1969.

The cool detachment of Bruder's approach is similar to that of WILLARD MIDGETTE. Midgette is quite specific about his subject matter, however; in *Choreography:The Paul Taylor Company*, for example, he intends each head to be a likeness and renders each environmental detail as exactly as possible. The endeavor eliminates all significant traces of the artist's sensibility normally discernible in color and touch. Neither has any independent existence in his work. They are completely subjugated to the illusionistic rendition of his subject. The ingenuousness of Midgette's approach, like that of an old-fashioned diorama painter, shows such earnestness that one is almost embarrassed in front of the work, or rather, inside the work, which is actually executed on life-size canvases hinged to form a continuous encircling environment.

WOLF KAHN, working in an Impressionist style, takes a disinterested attitude toward specificity of his subject. He is more interested in painterly means than either Bruder or Midgette. Some of his country barn and house paintings are practically abstract, having been blurred out of focus. This is especially true of the gray, fog-enshrouded earlier landscapes. Kahn aligns barn edges with the picture edge, eliminates detail, and uses strong compositional thrusts in many of his paintings; these formal devices save the paintings from banality. The painterliness of his impasto operates to advantage in the gray atmospheric paintings, but some of the recent versions in garish tube colors — magenta and red — seem too harsh for such a sensibility.

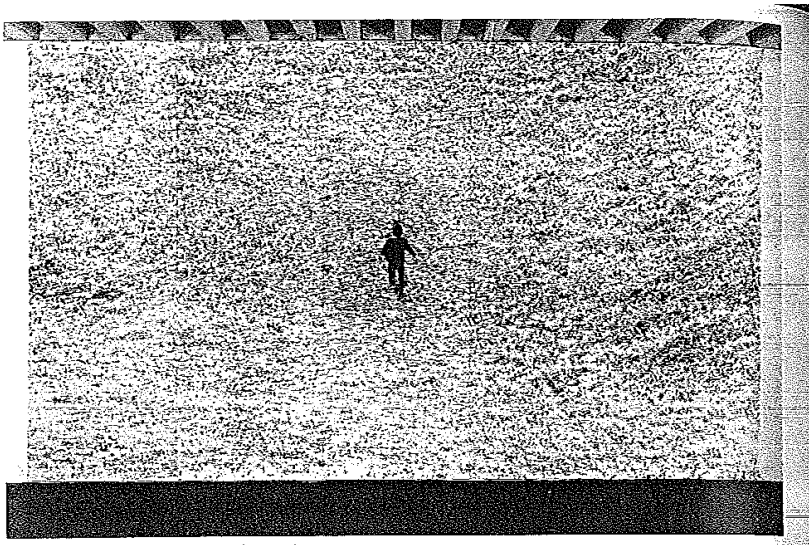
At this point in time it is understandable, perhaps, that urban-oriented, sophisticated artists should yearn for other times, other places. Kahn, along with Fairfield Porter and others, are involved in rural nostalgia while Bruder reimagines the golden age of Classicism and Midgette plays with the mechanics of trompe-l'oeil.

LOUISE NEVELSON has returned to the black wooden conglomerate constructions which are her hallmark. She exhibited similar black sculptures at the age of 59 in her 1958 "Moon Garden Plus One" exhibition. This was her first "environmental" exhibition of the work of her mature style, which coalesced in the (and in her) mid-'50s. The current show, entitled "Houses," but not confined to that configuration alone, includes dollhouses, armoires, columns, plaques, a table, and two large wall-size reliefs. All the work is cluttered; every cavity is filled and each surface is articulated with wooden trim, knobs, molding, furniture parts, spools, and scraps chosen from an apparently inexhaustible inventory. Her obsession to add and fill amounts to a horror vacui. The works look like jigsaw puzzles of some Surreal cityscape lining the gallery walls and occupying much of the floor space.

Nevelson's best work has a Surrealist flavor. It is close to the paintings of Yves Tanguy and those of his wife, Kay Sage (like *Hyphen* of 1954, for example). Aside from early Giacometti, Surrealism apparently didn't produce any major sculptors. There are only occasional objects and some larger works that are slightly Surrealistic by a number of Surrealist artists. One thinks of Joseph Cornell, of course, but he, like Nevelson, comes later. She shares a pictorial approach to her medium with Cornell. All Nevelson's work (with the possible exception of some early pieces) is frontal. Her position is really that of a relief-maker working with shallow depth. When she attempts to work in metal or Plexiglas or to make unadorned, Minimal pieces she is at a disadvantage. She can't compete with sculptors who have clear notions of how unitary shapes read in three dimensions so that her work in this vein has a lifeless rigidity.

Nevelson's approach is additive and anticompositional. She modulates, accents, and rhythmically stresses, but she can't compose outside of stacking and repeating variable units. She unifies the work with paint rather than structurally. Black paint eradicates all traces of the natural characteristics of wood as well as does the white or gold paint she sometimes uses instead, but it produces deeper shadows and a more pictorial sense of mystery. Nevelson's work has a lot in common with Schwitters' including the fact that they share a Cubist-collage approach. Her current exhibition includes some collages for the first time. Like Schwitters, Nevelson

Willard Midgette, *Choreography: The Paul Taylor Company* (8 panels), o/c, 1972.



Giovanni Anselmo, *Entering Into The Work*, photograph on canvas, 118" x 197", 1971.

Agnes Denes, *Introspection III, Aesthetics* (Picasso x-ray), 36" x 72", 1972.

seems to have a loving, sensual attitude toward the collage element — the bit of lace or doily, the silver seal, the colored scrap of paper. It is surprising that she never worked before in the medium, though she does nothing to expand its limits.

A monograph on Nevelson by her dealer, Arnold Glimcher, was published by Praeger at the time of her show. It contains (to its discredit) numerous references to the business end of things, and promotes her inferior work. I question the ultimate wisdom of an unscholarly treatment of an artist of Nevelson's stature and would have preferred a professional's objective overview.

If diligence, intellectual curiosity, a good heart, and attention to detail are qualities necessary to produce a work of art, AGNES DENES has them all. Her encyclopedic simplifications and systemizations of everything from evolution to esthetics, from truth to traffic patterns, are occasionally so densely compacted that they seem fictional (her *Dialectical Triangulations*, for instance). At other times they are so open and simple they seem naive, like her x-rays of art works to "get at" the artist's hidden meaning. The recent show at A.I.R. contained the results of a whole range of her investigations presented in a variety of modes. She has invented her own process of photographing and producing huge prints which enables her to put her conclusions into visual form with a maximum of comprehensiveness and a minimum of confusion. Her latest elongated

print, *Psychograph*, is her most fascinating work from a purely associative point of view. It shows the results of analyses by two psychologists (unidentified) of the responses made by 12 well-known artists (also unidentified) to her questionnaire about their aspirations and thoughts on art. It evokes general feelings of a poetic sort about the role of an artist in today's society and about art in general. She may perhaps be tilting at windmills, but each foray she makes seems to be more successful than the last. Her lack of intimidation in the face of sophisticated material equals the futility of ever coming to know and codify everything.

GIOVANNI ANSELMO's exhibition consisted of several small gray framing projectors located within the large room at John Weber's and a single, wall-sized photograph on canvas in the smaller gallery. The photograph shows the artist from an aerial view running away from the camera in a field of grass on which the figure is centered. Entitled *Entering Into the Work*, it is an obvious play on the Abstract Expressionist notion of being "in the work" which is half pun and half a misreading of the idea of Action Painting. The huge size of the canvas, of course, includes the viewer in the work too, which is intentional, I'm sure, as is the vertigo caused by the viewing angle. Anselmo's art exists in the tension between the idea and its realization by the viewer. You sense the work physically and intellectually, becoming aware of yourself in the process. *Invisible (One Slide Saying Visible)*, 1971, consists of the word "visible" being visible when in focus on some solid material (the viewer's leg) about 4" up and 5' away from the lens of the projector on the floor. Like the tree falling in the forest, the work is invisible without the viewer to provide the intelligence to find the word and the screen for it. *Tutto*, 1971-72, comprises two projectors — one projecting "tut," the other "to." Together they add up to "tutto" or wholeness. Anselmo's work used to be highly physical in its expressivity. Now it is narrative, literary, and humorous.

RONALD BLADEN occupies a sculptural position that is exactly opposite to that of Louise Nevelson. His work is holistic, fully three-dimensional, and clean of surface. But the unbroken black skins of his pieces hide an Expressionist heart that his resolutely Minimal stance rarely permits us to see. His recent show of plywood prototypes and drawings, however, exposed this interior world in a small model for *Coltrane*, 1969, which bristled with aggressive nails and splinters of roughly cut plywood. Looking for all the world like a Piranesi prison, it is a maze of engineering complexity so dense it seems overbuilt. It serves to remind us that the artist's roots are in Abstract Expressionism and post-Abstract Expressionism; he exhibited as a painter until 1965. Even today Bladen's ideas for his sculptures seem to be closely related to painting configurations. His maze of 1970, for instance, was a major sculpture which has yet to receive proper critical attention, but seeing its drawing in this show confirmed my original impression of its similarity to Frank Stella's *Marriage of Reason and Squalor* of 1959. Some of the other models reminded me of paintings by Franz Kline and of the mid-'60s canvases of Al Held. But, despite this, Bladen's work is never pictorial. Its scale, the space it defines, the architectural references it makes, and its monumentality are on a sculptural plane despite the miniature level of an exhibition of models.

THOMAS BANG's repertory of small, floor-bound plaster block and wire coil sculptures has been augmented this year. The new works, also small in scale, are six wall pieces in wire and black rubber. They play similar kinds of competition, connection, and counting games with the viewer, but stress the flexibility of their materials and coloristically incorporate the whiteness of the wall in a pictorial way as well. Bang's work explores interesting nonfigurative, nonarchitectural, and sculptural ideas. One is grateful for the lack of histrionics.

—APRIL KINGSLEY

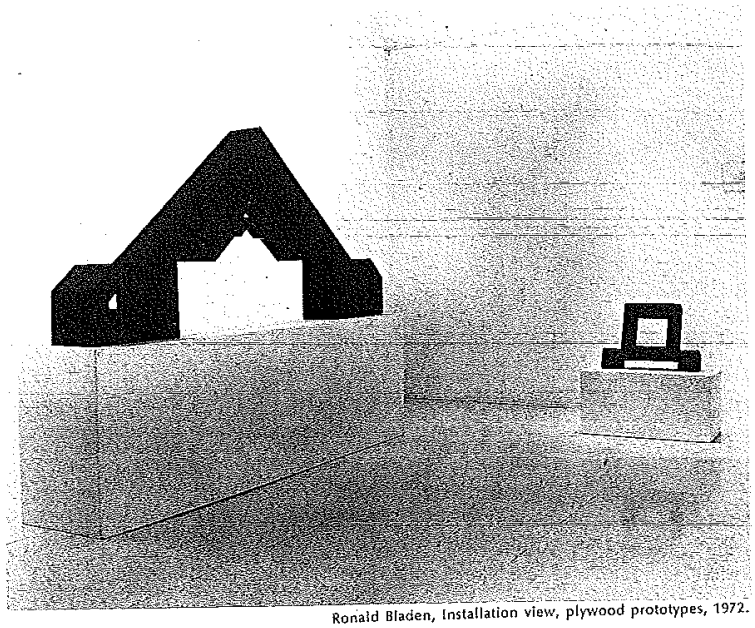
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ATTITUDES, 1972, Pasadena Art Museum; FOUR WOMEN, Los Angeles County Museum of Art:

HASKELL: I'd like you to give a real big Pasadena welcome to a genuinely witty guy whom we haven't seen for a while, but who always has a surprise or two for us . . . ladies and gentlemen, a real pro, John Baldessari.

JOHN: Thank you Barbara, real happy to be here.

HASKELL: Always a pleasure. I understand you've got something a little new for us this time.

JOHN: That's right, Barbara. I thought it would be a good idea, since I knew everybody else would be doing deadly serious stuff—you know, "Art"—to just, well, sorta stand up there and tell it like it is. I call it "Ten Fables."



Ronald Bladen, Installation view, plywood prototypes, 1972.

HASKELL: Sounds marvelous. Ladies and gentlemen, John Baldessari and his "Ten Fables."

(John performs piece.)

HASKELL: Great, just great. A fine, original piece of material. *(Turns to audience)* But, moving right along, I'd like you to meet a newcomer to the Pasadena scene . . .

In an apocryphal joke, a Cockney woman says, apropos an upcoming election, "I never votes; it only encourages 'em." But encourage we must, and so these civic duty surveys of young/underexposed local artists drone on in spite of an obviously dry hole of talent (there are few enough good artists, fewer good local artists, fewer still younger, good, local artists; and there are practically none of these the tiny audience who cares about them doesn't already know about; and when you slice *that* in half by gender, as LACMA does, you've got just about nothin'). We operate, however, under two art world premises hopefully giving the lie to such pessimism: 1) the whole scene has been revolutionized via structure-of-perception, i.e., "there're so many young artists doing such interesting things"; and 2) it's the museum's duty to document them. Underlying the first is a supposition at least a hundred years old: avant-garde "serious" artists labor thanklessly away in their garrets, true only to their own reckless visions, until a curator or dealer comes around and *happens* to find all this "important" work going on. (More orthodox painters and sculptors have long stood accused of fashioning their wares with Leo Castelli or MOMA in the backs of their heads — one more indication, so the suspicion went, of bourgeois decadence; but it's now halfway evident that most of "Attitudes, '72" and "Four Women" has been veritably hothoused by hopes hung out on the graduate-school-to-museum grapevine.) The work is a species of demi-intellectual interior decoration, with the elected artists called in to "do a piece" in a given space, i.e., spiffy it up, light on the hardware, heavy on the phenomenology. It is unintentionally reminiscent of an S. J. Perelman playlet* in which a young woman likewise contracts to have her quarters daringly

*S.J. Perelman. "De Gustibus Ain't What Dey Used to Be," *The Most of S.J. Perelman*, New York, 1962, p. 510.