

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Tazzi, Pier Luigi, "Sculpture in Review: Critics and Curators: What is Today's Sculpture? Three Views" Artforum, September, 1986

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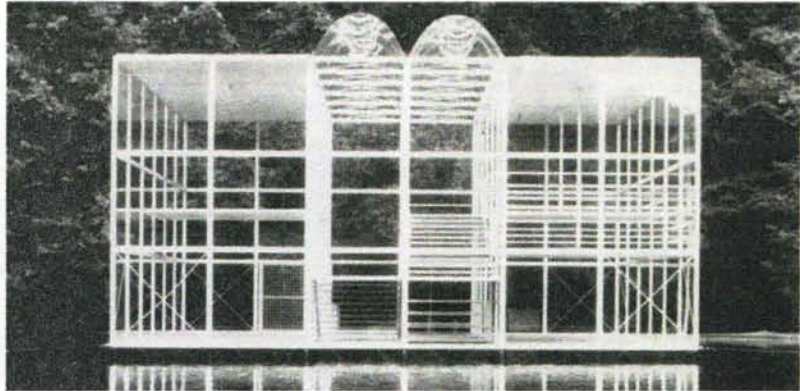
SCULPTURE IN REVIEW CRITICS AND CURATORS

WHAT IS TODAY'S SCULPTURE? THREE VIEWS

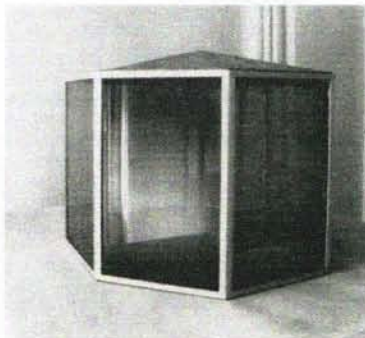
Park Sonsbeek, Arnhem

The Sonsbeek exhibition in Arnhem, Holland, was established in 1949 as a triennial international survey of sculpture, but two long breaks interrupted its appearance—the first from 1958 to 1966, and the second from 1971 until right now. It is not surprising that Sonsbeek has been revived this year. Recently we have seen an increase of activity in the field of sculpture, and in exhibitions specifically designed to explore that field—for example, Harald Szeemann's "Spuren, Skulpturen und Monumente ihrer präzisen Reise" (Traces, sculptures, and monuments of the artists' precise journey) last winter in Zurich, and his "De Sculptura" this summer in Vienna, Adelina von Fürstenberg's "Promenades" show last year in Geneva, and so on. Sonsbeek now rejoins this company, bringing with it its particular tradition of exploring the relationship between the artwork and its environment, whether interior or exterior. Curator Saskia Bos has restricted the number of artists included to 50, but their works are spread about not only outside in the Park Sonsbeek—an area of meadows, woods, pools, canals, and waterfalls—but also in the park's large white villa; in three glass pavilions, one of them afloat in a pond, built in the park for the occasion; and in the local Gemeentemuseum. Thus the art is presented inside, outside, in spaces transparent from inside and outside, and near, far, through.

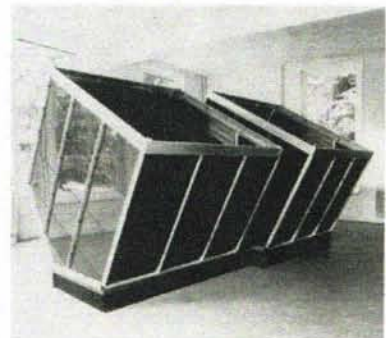
This is a fragile structure, and its fragility recalls "Promenades," which was also in a park, the Parc Lullin, on Lac Lemans. There, the artists' directions and interventions were held together as in a suspended embroidery (welcome indeed after years of heavy, mammoth sculpture, in particular from America). The show was a light pause, vaguely arcadian, as if twilight, and it suggested a certain nostalgia. Sonsbeek 86 is harsher. Where "Promenades" blended its artists in a transgenerational community, here we are no longer all the same age; there are the fathers—the Richard Artschwagers, the



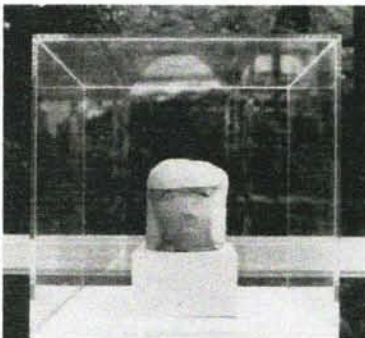
Wiek Röling, pavilion in manmade lake at Park Sonsbeek, Arnhem, 1986, glass, ca. 42' 5" x 55' 3" x 22' 9"



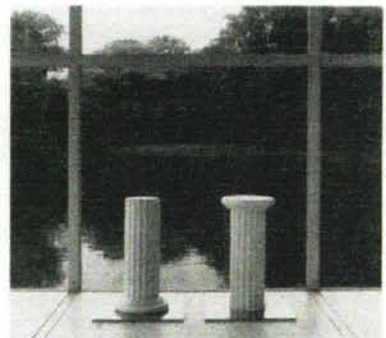
Dan Graham, *Oktagon für Münster (Octagon for Münster)*, 1986, glass and aluminum, ca. 23 1/4" x 27 1/4" x 27 1/4"



Reinhard Mucha, *Hagenow-Land (Hagenow countryside)*, 1986, aluminum, spotlights, wood, felt, and glass, ca. 7' x 7' x 6' 2"



Marisa Merz, *untitled*, 1988, clay with copper thread, ca. 1' x 6" x 6"



Giulio Paolini, *Cafeldoscopio (Kaleidoscope)*, 1976, two columns, each ca. 3' high, and two mirrors, each ca. 23" x 33"

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Claes Oldenburgs, the John Chamberlains, the Bruce Naumans; there are the children—the Niek Kempes, the Fortuyn/O'Briens, the Heimo Zobernigs; in between there is a middle generation, its members tending now toward its elders, now toward its juniors—and, in this model, where does Rebecca Horn or Marisa Merz stand? Sonsbeek 86 is also harsher in that while in "Promenades" one could walk among the works in such a way that one felt one was entering their space, most of the sculpture in Arnhem resists this kind of coexistence. The theme of the show is skin, which, whether dry and rough or soft and pliant, is still a border, a boundary, a line of separation. The door of Thomas Schütte's *Schutzraum* (Room of protection, 1986) remains closed. Reinhard Mucha's overpainted greenhouses lie upside down on their roofs, impenetrable; Marisa Merz's steel-and-copper webs bar the waterside entrance to a cabin on a pond—one can see them only from the opposite bank. Yet these various kinds of skin each have their own sensitivity. They have a certain nakedness, an openness to the future. Seen in this light, the Dutch show is softer than was its Swiss predecessor: rather than confining the work in the outdoor cage of the park, Bos has cast a net through various of the waters of contemporary sculpture—its past, its present, its future.

What has she caught in the net? One may extract three general principles. First: sculpture today—and, by extension, art today—tends toward the issue of design, toward the realization in the object of a relationship between form and function, even if the function is symbolic. One can recognize various lines of descent here. One, from Artschwager, runs through a Siah Armajani variation, then diverges, leading in one direction to Kempes and Peer Veneman and in the other to Jan Verduyck. From Oldenburg, a line goes one way to Fortuyn/O'Brien and another to Jiří Georg Dokoupil. There is also an antidesign line—a Nauman line—which prepares the ground for Mucha, Schütte, and Harald Klingenhöller. Secondly, and relatedly, the media that give form to the contemporary artwork derive from materials and production processes only vaguely understandable through observation alone. Where much of the art of the last twenty-five years—process art, Minimalism, *arte povera*, etc.—has sought a relationship with its matter, "the real thing," today artificial or artificial-looking materials are used to bring out the artifice of art.

The third of the show's inferences is a feeling of nostalgia. Giulio Paolini's *Calcidoscopia* (Kaleidoscope), for example, dating from 1976 but strikingly reconceptualized here, looks back to the classical age. Two identical sections of column stand adjacent but head to toe, so that what is the capital for one is the base for the other; in a beautiful play on transparency, they are set on two squares of mir-

ror, and sit on a floor of the glass pavilion in the pond. Jenny Holzer's nostalgia is of a romantic/puritan sort: a stone bench with an engraved inscription stands tombstonelike alone under a fir. In a small grotto beneath a waterfall Bertrand Lavier has placed a mirror, covered in a thick layer of transparent acrylic, so that it reflects the landscape visible through the shimmering curtain of water that fills the entrance to the cave; both the water and the path of the landscape image. Lavier's nostalgia for the protoromantic elements of the Enlightenment carries over into the sentimental irony of Fortuyn/O'Brien, whose two large painted trellises look like stands for mirrors but instead frame glass windows, and function as a little *petit-bourgeois* gateway to a copse of tall trees. Something similar is visible in Dokoupil, who shows two playful, pseudoingenuous works: outside, another gateway (gigantic, mocking), with a crown in the shape of the letters "OMO" (the name of a brand of detergent), leads into a forest; in the villa, an enameled ceramic statue of a series of numbers—"4711," a cologne—preserves the contorting forms of the fire in which it was baked.

In this context the artist can bring together the most diverse forms possible and then treat them with a nameless desire. Some work, for example Richard Deacon's, has no point of reference, suggesting neither abstraction, nor an arrest of movement, nor raw material. Other works look as if they once made such references but have lost their need for them, have become mysteriously secret, indecipherably allusive. Ettore Spalletti's small fountain in the woods evokes a memory as evanescent as its pale, chalky turquoise color. Anish Kapoor's and Shirazeh Houshiary's work shows a crude sense of estrangement. And it introduces another development: things penetrate from other worlds. This has happened before, from Edouard Manet's *japonisme* to Francesco Clemente's Indian miniatures, but now it is not the colonizer who introduces them but the colonized, the genetic product of the process of colonization. Armajani, originally from Iran, inherits an awareness of a society that has evolved very differently from those of the West; to and with his American experience he brings a moral, constructive passion. Houshiary and Kapoor, from Iran and India respectively, confront the rectilinear abstraction of Western geometry with a curvilinear organicism rooted in Eastern culture. To the phallogocentrism of Western art they oppose the feminine, enveloping nature of the Oriental imagination. Everything is slowly, mysteriously, tenaciously changing, and Sonsbeek 86 gathers in its net some significant samples of the mutation in action.

—PIER LUIGI TAZZI

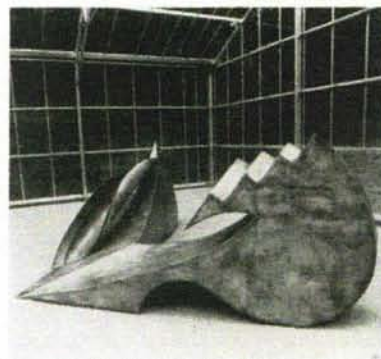
(Continued from the Italian by Meg Jurek)



Jiří Georg Dokoupil, *OMO*, 1986, ferroconcrete and sprayed cement, ca. 20'9" x 30' x 5'4"



Fortuyn/O'Brien, *It's 10 o'clock, do you know where your children are?*, 1986, iron, wood, and Perspex, 2 parts, ea. ca. 9'9" x 4'7" x 1'2"



Shirazeh Houshiary, *Blowing Together*, 1985, zinc, ca. 78 x 39 x 12"