REVIEWS

PHILIP PEARLSTEIN, Finch College Museum of Art; FRED SANDBACK, John Weber Gallery; DAN FLAVIN, Leo Castelli uptown; JENNIFER BARTLETT, Paula Cooper; MAUDE BOLTZ, DARIA DOROSH, A.I.R.:

PHILIP PEARLSTEIN's drawings have the same iconography as his paintings, Roman landscapes in the second half of the '50s and nudes after 1960. There is a difference between them, however, which may have to do with the fact that the surfaces of drawings include areas untouched by hand whereas in paintings, as a rule, everything has been entered as a decision by the artist, the "empty" background no less than the foreground. There is a full surface in Pearlstein's paintings that is not present in the drawings. Without the rich two-dimensionality of the painting, the drawings reveal Pearlstein as something of a Mannerist. This term has taken a beating in the last ten years; it has been applied to Stella and to Warhol, neither of whom appears to be in any relationship to the 16th century at all. Still Pearlstein's figures can be compared to Mannerist figures. Specifically he goes in for elaborate contraposto and abrupt foreshortenings. As a result, his figures combine a massive substantiality with an inventory of elisions. As the models corkscrew dizzily and are seen at sharp angles, buttock and breast, knee and shoulder abut. And at any moment the models can lose their head, hands, or feet. Occasional specific parallels to the 16th century present themselves, such as the protracted solid volumes, following the picture plane, of Venus in Bronzino's *The Allegory of Luxury* (National Gallery, London) or the muscular headless nude in the foreground of Rosso's *Moses and the Daughters of Jethro* (Uffizi). If I am right Pearlstein's single and paired nudes, then, sometimes resemble the poses of figures within Mannerist compositions.

It became clear from looking at the drawings that Pearlstein draws as much for compositional reasons as anything else. He does not study anatomy with any especial precision in the drawings, but considers conjunctions and sequences of forms. The fact that he works from the model is not, in itself, proof of his naturalism. You can draw like Raphael or like Brueghel from nature; it depends what you want. What the artist perceives is not a neutral pageant of true forms, but a stylistically filtered selection. And what the model seems to do for Pearlstein in his drawings is provide him with the facticity of her presence, so that his Mannerist sense of dramatic posture can incorporate external data. He has noted that "when painting, my forms tend to grow larger as I work on them," but the drawings state pretty clearly the same procrustean notion of composition found in the paintings. As Meyer Schapiro has pointed out in another context, "the frame belongs . . . to the space of the observer rather than to the illusory three-dimensional world disclosed within and behind." Thus the tough interception of whole forms by the edge of the picture implies an extended field of which the image is only a sample. In the drawings the collision of whole forms and partial segments of the field of perception is seen without the compensating formality of his paintings. Hence, the willed nature of the conjunction is itself Mannerist in its open artificiality. Something like the corporeality of Courbet and the space of Degas are conjoined.

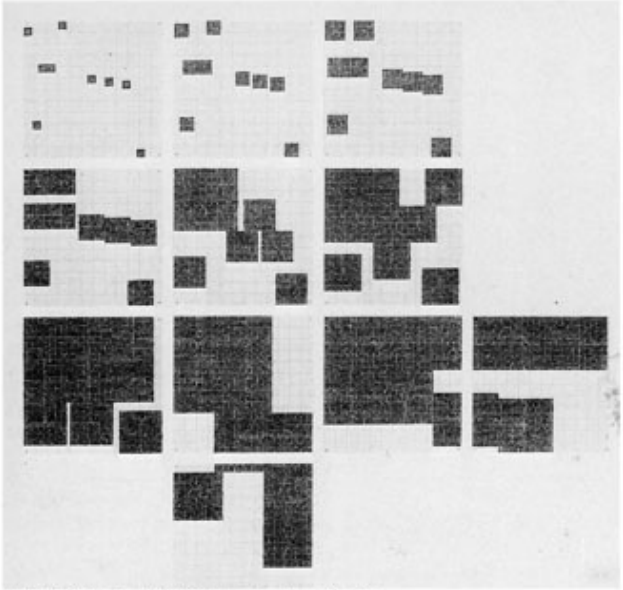
Philip Pearlstein, *Couple on Bed (Male Seated, Female Lying Down)*, 1972, pencil, 19" x 24".

Fred Sandback, *The First of Sixteen 2-Part Pieces*, 1974, yarn.

FRED SANDBACK's *Sixteen 2-Part Pieces* took place in the small room at the Weber Gallery. Sixteen times the artist changed the location of two taut, dark pieces of yarn that crossed the room from wall to wall. He had planned in advance where the lines should run on a diagram in the Gallery office. I saw the first couple of pieces, and my feelings went something like this. After I saw the diagrammatic drawing, I think I grasped the principle. Then I saw the first variation and that confirmed the feeling that I had the news already. The next variation was evidence of the punctiliousness of the artist, or of somebody acting for him (what's the difference?), but I felt no increase in the input of information concerning Sandback's work. Seeing the pieces enacted did not add to the artist's clear initial statement of purpose.

What I liked about the pieces, and I feel I can speak about them all because the system of which they are part is not one that can support a surprise, if the artist adheres to it, as I have every reason to think he will, is their sophistication. I am pleased that works of such tenuous refinement are worth somebody's while to put on. A pleasure pavilion of Minimal art, it is a Xanadu of sensory deprivation. The attenuated elegance of the series is very soothing and placid on an environmental scale. Such a system is more reasonably given as a proposition or a record than as a spatial experience, as can be seen from the artist's *16 Variationen von 2 Diagonale linen*, a pamphlet of 1972, put out by a group of German galleries and the Kunsthalle, Bern. Here the repeated gray schematic of the room and the variable two lines printed in yellow make one of those nice low-profile books the art world abounds in at present. To step in the room once, and once more, reveals the fact that there is the lack of a sufficiently intricate stimulus.

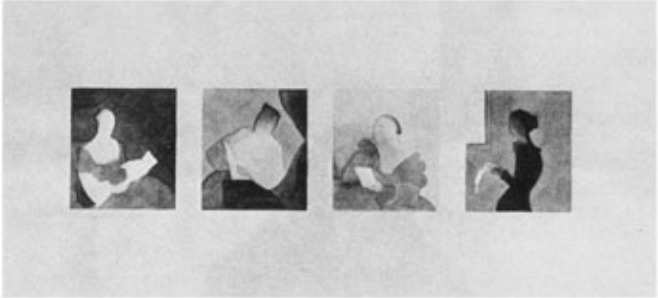
DAN FLAVIN's new show is entitled/described: "Some uneven cool white circular fluorescent light for the new, even walls of the Leo Castelli Gallery . . . (with necessary sketches and diagrams) and seven pairs of diagrams with color, for lamp barred corridors." Translation: there is one environmental piece, a letter-cum-diagram with instruction on how to install it, and cheerful colored drawings in the back room (the "lamp barred corridors"). Thus there is the big work, accompanied by small saleable items, an



Jennifer Bartlett, *Enclosure: Drift*, 1973, m/m, 11 units, each 12" x 12".

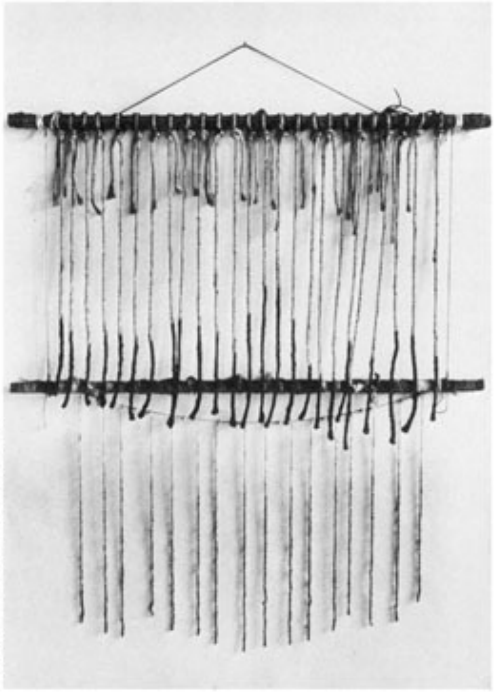
understandable though not a salutary mix. The innovation, as I suppose it can be called, is the substitution of circular light fittings for tubular ones, used here, as in several recent shows. They glow on each side as you enter the front room. The parallel installations are like facing Ls, both running down the corners, one extending most of the way along the skirting to the opposite wall, one stopping short. I can see why some such step was necessary for Flavin because his later use of straight tubular lights was getting more elaborate and fussy, so that an awkward complexity was being demanded of readymade units whose original value to him had been simplicity and starkness. The desire for humble origins that had motivated Flavin's original use of fluorescent tubes was compromised by increasing expertise and environmental ambition. It may be that switching to circular fittings is what is needed for him to recover the directness of his early work, for it does seem that he was encountering developmental problems with the standard tube fixtures, but it is too early to say on the evidence of this piece. The next exhibit may show, one way or the other.

JENNIFER BARTLETT is a writer as well as a painter and the interrelations are worth mentioning. In *Cleopatra I–IV*, 1971 (Adventures In Poetry, 437 East 12 Street, New York City, 10009) she combines chronology, historical genre, sexual metaphors, aphoristic sentences, and, in section II, an array of diagrammatic signs in systematic rows. It is this area of course that is amplified in her paintings, which are based on square enameled metal plates on which a grid has been printed. In the grid she puts blob-like dots, hand-done in their irregularity, which make sequential runs, repeating patterns, figure-field images. These are seen in various combinations as the plates themselves are assembled in extensive grid patterns. There is a "list of works" that accompanies the show and it is of some significance as a key, giving titles and descriptions. "*Nine Points*. Establishing nine points through random selection"; "*Chicken Tracks*. Plate 1: horizontal, vertical, diagonal extension of one unit from nine points"; and "*Goal Post*. Vertical horizontal vertical." Thus the visual display is augmented by the commentary, but the verbal account does not amount to much. There is a kind of pedagogic obviousness about the described system which is a far cry from the complex interplay of signifiers in *Cleopatra I–IV*. Bartlett seems to have taken the early 20th-century point-line-plane kind of design construction and applied it to the mid-century idiom of repetitive forms in bloc grids. The results are visually and conceptually less interesting than her writing. It is typical that the numbers that key the pieces on the wall to the "list of works" are so discreet and minute as to be almost overlookable. Visuality seems to inhibit her compared to the mixture of genres.



Daria Dorosh, *The Spirit of the Letter*, 1973, watercolor.

The A.I.R. gallery has moved from two-artist to one-artist shows this season, but returned to the earlier format for MAUDE BOLTZ and DARIA DOROSH. To take Boltz first: there are none of the large free-falling pieces, like trapezes or rope ladders, making long, kinky connections between ceiling and room-space that characterized her last show. The new pieces are smaller and wall-based, showing her acute sense of the relation of free and fixed materials, of loose and supportive forms. *Rain Dance*, 1973, with its two-story forms and color-dipped dangling strings, is a good example of her sensibility. Though it does not show her gifts fully extended, it reveals the operation of her keen judgment within apparently tousled and casual structures. Daria Dorosh's watercolors use successive images, because her soft, soft colors, with phantasmal think balloons and fading landscapes, need the reassurance of repetition. Without the echoes one could not be sure of what one was seeing. Her allusions almost elude one owing to her pale hues: *The Spirit of the Letter*, for instance, shows four period figures reading letters,



Maude Boltz, *Rain Dance*, 1974, m/m, 2½' x 3½'.

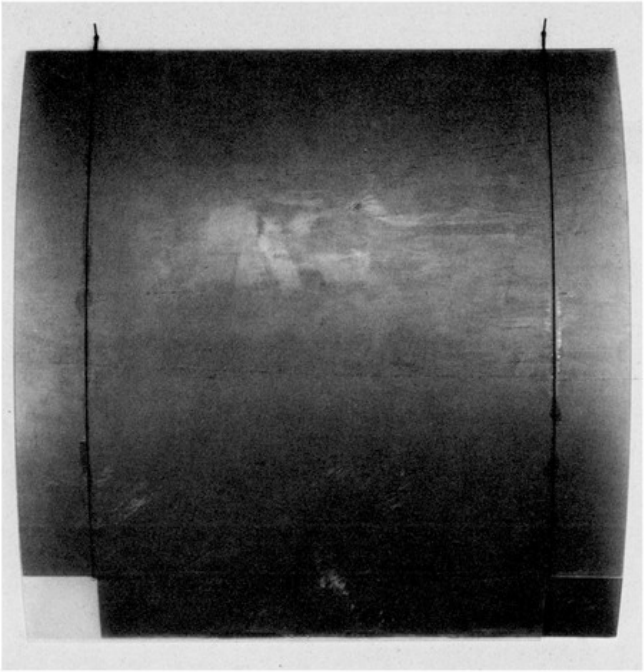
and the title seems to refer to a book by Jean Leymarie on epistolary genre. The point is made but her delicacy is almost an absence; it is a lyricism on the edge of recognition.

—LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

CHRIS WILMARTH, Rosa Esman Gallery; "SEVEN AMERICANS," Washburn Gallery; "PAINTINGS OF THE THIRTIES," Midtown Galleries:

CHRIS WILMARTH's recent hanging sculptures and studies on paper allow a categorical interest in the properties of materials to sustain an assertively painterly but not extrinsic surface handling. The four sculptures shown recently are reliefs, somewhere between freestanding independence and an altogether wall-bound planarity. If they relate more closely to the plane of the wall than to that of the floor, they nevertheless do so against a formidable gravitational pull. Further, they break down categorically into those which lay a square plate of glass over a square metal plate versus those which combine two squares of glass. Either way, the facing glass is etched to a nocturnelike softness that holds hazily to rectangular form by its involvement with surface. Drawings in graphite and watercolor relate sensitively, in turn, to the sculptures.

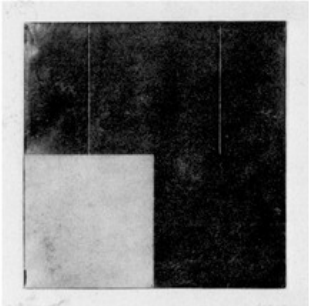
At Wilmarth's 1972 show at the Paula Cooper Gallery (*Artforum*, June, 1972) I was concerned that, when his wall pieces were too small, the exigencies of glass-cutting and the accidental details of the wire rope drew too much attention to themselves as facture. That seemed to be at variance with their overall coolness and subtlety. The new wall pieces, each over a square yard, overcome this difficulty and become more involved with sculptural space as well. The cutting in and bending back of the steel layer behind in the two works from 1973 — *Given* and *Blue Start* — grants them a more literal and sculpturesque presence without compromising a sense of the metal as essentially a square sheet of the same size as the flat glass in front. This also allows the tonalism of the etched glass to stand in sensitive relation to the less uniformly, but equally strongly, modified steel behind; the overall *sfumato* of the glass is met by the chiaroscuro of the bent plate — which affects only part of the metal plate but to a more severe degree. The two works from this year, *Arbor for Two Grays* and *Stornoway*, use pairs of glass plates, rather than glass with steel, and bend out from the wall in a graceful segmental curve, instead of propping out at an angle. They both relate to and also diverge from the works with steel, and this pairing of sameness with difference is characteristic of Wilmarth's art.



Chris Wilmarth, *Stornoway*, 1974, etched, contoured clear and gray glass, 42" x 42" x 5".

Within the single piece the same binary impulse operates in terms of form, especially in a tendency to deal at once with symmetry and asymmetry. We see configurations in which the *fact* of a pair of forms asserts sameness while, on other grounds, the same two forms constitute a pair in opposition — lighter/darker, in front/behind, or open/closed. In *Stornoway*, for instance, the glass behind is darker, while both are supported by symmetrically stretched cables from two cutout lower corners. The simple linearity of the wire is checked by its urgent tensile duties, just as the cutout corners function structurally and not just as pattern. Each corner is cut out of only one sheet (with a hole in its opposite place), so that the cutouts are in palpably different physical planes, even though they function interdependently as both structure and composition.

Part of the appeal of this setup is formal, because the sense that the piece is a homogeneous composition is in itself a gratification, just as the painterliness of the etched surface is rewarding even if not thoroughly sculptural. More important is that both these features are only two-dimensional "facets" of essentially three-dimensional ideas. If the handling of the face is painterly and flat, the literal superimposition of one plate almost exactly over another of the same size involves ideas of overlap — as well as mass, density, and flexibility — that cannot be accommodated to a two-dimensional conception. Similarly, the effect of translucency involves the physicality of the materials and their manipulation in real light and space. The insistent materiality of Wilmarth's pieces insures that they are not merely transient, quasi-linguistic "ideas," despite their ambiguities.



Chris Wilmarth, *Given*, 1974, translucent paper, graphite, and staples, 12¼" x 12¼".

When glass and metal are combined, as in *Blue Start*, the same situation is interestingly altered. For one thing, the symmetry of the conceptual system itself shifts its axis. Two glasses, both equally bent, could be reversed, whereas bent steel cannot fit over flat glass, and would obscure it even if it could. Hence sameness becomes a matter of *equivalent difference*, and sameness and difference bring different qualities to the fore. For example, glass turns out to have a sheen that is perhaps unexpectedly like metal. As a finely scratched surface of literally vitreous hardness and initial gloss, the etched glass asserts a partial opacity which suggests the way silver accumulates a membrane of scratches that locates reflected light while heightening a sense of surface.

The glass has to reveal itself and also reveal the metal, while the steel has only to be itself. However, even the fact that the more opaquely planar element is behind tends to reverse the relation of literal surface and picture plane in painting and to generate a nonpictorial arrangement. For Wilmarth it seems important that the glass reads as massively and substantially as the metal, partly to extend to all possible analogies between the two materials (both are thick, sharp-edged sheets of once-molten substances) and partly so that the differences may be all the more pointedly abstract.

If painterly features are welcomed without disruption of the more purely sculptural concerns, the wire lines and supporting pins of Wilmarth's work also avoid, at the other extreme, the sub-esthetic quality of a mere armature. Even the pegs from which the pieces hang supply a helpful indication of physical force; and the undeniable reality of the wires prevents them from becoming pictorially disembodied. How the pieces prop themselves out from the wall, whether at an angle or in a bowed curve, ultimately recalls a preference for obtuse raking angles and curves that are segments of circles in Cubist painting. But Wilmarth's angular and segmental forms are intrinsically spatial adjustments of concrete planes.