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ALAN SARET: DANIEL WEINBERG GALLERY

by Colin Gardner

Alan Saret is usually associated with the so-called post-Minimalist generation of sculptors that emerged in the mid to late '60s and included Lynda Benglis, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, Eva Hesse, and Richard Tuttle. Whereas the Minimalists explored the contingent relationship of fixed objects to surrounding space, this younger group tended to eschew objecthood in favor of ephemerality. Instead of permanent objects in gestaltlike relationships to fixed spaces, they produced transient works that could be set up according to written instructions, taken down, packed away, and reassembled later in new and different permutations.

In Saret's case, however, such historical generalization is as misleading as it is enlightening. Although he shares post-Minimalist concerns with time, site, and expressive gesture—particularly the notion of drawing in three-dimensional space—Saret refuses to condone that movement's overt anti-illusionism. Despite his use of industrial materials such as rubber, electrical cord, fencing, and chicken wire and his obvious focus on architectonic structure, Saret has always seen his work as hallucinatory, attempting to create fantastic worlds of metamorphosis, ethereality, and dispersal that both conjure up and partake of the transcendental "spirit" of nature itself. His initial description of his oeuvre as "Mountains of Chance, Documents of Ruralism. . . . Changing Manufactures," seems as apt today as it was in the late '60s.

In fact, Saret's most recent installation—significantly titled *Weightless*—reasserted these values to the point of overtly regenerating earlier works. Hooke's *Law I–III* (all 1990), each reference a lost 1968 work of the same name, in which cylindrical shapes of chicken wire mimic the outline of an open roll of canvas. In this case they are presented singly, stacked, or as post and lintel structures to create ambiguous paradigms of architecture, ruin, shelter, or containment. They also exploit the antimass characteristics of Constructivism, emptying out architectural volume in order to reveal process and the constructed nature of the work as an intercession with open space. In this case, volume is line, mass is translucent space. Similarly, *Regla*, 1990, which resembles a large, formless hairball dangling from the ceiling, refers back to the billowing, cloudlike clusters of wire and mesh of *Sun Register*, 1967, and *Zinc Fire*, 1968–73. Each example combines a sense of drawing automatically in space with the suggestion of a vaporous disintegration of form under the weight of gravity and natural processes.

This material symbiosis with nature and organicism is most fully resolved in *Arch Glade*, 1990, in which green plastic-coated wire mesh is folded back on itself to create a vertical monument that variously resembles an arched torso, a natural glade, or the picturesque image of fishing nets hanging up to dry. The work seems weightless yet firmly anchored, largely because its central armature is also transparent. The overlapping layers of wire create a sort of sculptural mirage, in which the work's inherent architecture seems to be simultaneously grounded by gravity and dispersed into the ether. Moreover, the wire's moiré effects tend to vacillate between opaqueness and ephemerality, while suggesting a shimmering surface patina without actually requiring the material presence of paint.

The show's chief drawback lies in Saret's inability to transform the gallery through material and spatial transgressions. His earlier installations involved materials that sprawled and draped across the space, colonizing it like a temporary bivouac of invading forces. In this case, the works seem completely inert and self-contained, as if they had been deliberately spaced for maximum esthetic effect. Despite their obvious attempts at ethereality, the pieces are more defined by their identity as art objects. Perhaps the hermeneutic problem lies in Saret's by now familiar and overworked vocabulary, as well as the inevitable historical contextualization that transforms all would-be spirituality into the material paradigm of a sculptual -ism, post- or otherwise.