

# ARTWEEK

## MARCH 17 1979

### ALAN SARET - VISIONARY ASPIRATIONS

by Suzaan Boettger

Amorphous globules of wire mesh, hanging by imperceptible threads from the gallery ceiling, make up Alan Saret's Matrix project currently at the University Art Museum. Consisting of multiple strands of vinyl-coated metal wires in variegated hues, the diaphanous shapes are less deliberately composed than loosely bundled. Serpentine lines are emphasized in a dot-dash pattern of several strands taken together and knotted every few inches. A work is then picked up at a random point and hung, allowing gravity to determine the final configuration.

Against the rather sharp light and white walls of the gallery, the glint of myriad wire webs is bright and festive - resembling a tangle of tiny Christmas tree lights. The eleven pieces on view are collectively titled "The Permutation Cluster Galaxy". Its description as an "installation" apparently refers to its on-site creation rather than to individual pieces related to each other or to the cubic space in which they are seen. Each object appears to be both fragile, due to the pliancy of the medium, and strong, because of the density of energetic curling lines. Breaking down the duality of skin and mass of traditional sculpture, the space and substance of Saret's pieces totally interpenetrate. Each is a transparent maze which looks, incidentally, not unlike a 3-D Jackson Pollock.

With these pieces, Saret continues his investigation of possible manipulations of folded materials. His aim in allowing a flexible fabric to bend naturally (he explained in a gallery talk last month) is to release the material's intrinsic spirit or essence. Previously, he has worked with freestanding and folded chicken wire and had draped sheets of black plastic over stationary objects. But by depending upon gravity to form the current work, he achieves the most genuinely natural, organic shape. Indeed, these mutable sculptures also recall a selection of hanging ferns or a collection of manes of hair.

Diverse metaphors have been offered here for what the pieces call to mind. Perhaps that is because, as an example of "process" art investigating innate qualities of material and spontaneously generated form, the results have only fleeting interest as visual objects. They are a "galaxy" of stars which, though pretty, have a meteoric life span.

In the three accompanying ink and gouache drawings, imaginative subject and inscriptions more directly reveal Saret's visionary intent for his work. Saret, a former New York artist who was trained in architecture, is undoubtedly best known for his "Ghosthouse" - a large tepee of steel fencing which he constructed and lived in for several months in 1975 at Artpark. It was born of his ecological consciousness

toward an economical and spiritual meshing of man and nature, a theme that he continues to explore in these informally rendered drawings of fantastic architecture and people. "Vine Castle, Equilibrium of Cosmic and Terrestrial Energies" has a dense forest of foliage (and of line, similar to the hanging pieces), Tiny figures ascend stairs to a covered templelike structure. Other structures, with varying perspective and scale, are seen in platforms high in the trees or on a small, cleared field. Multiple moons in the space beyond add to the mysterious view of a primeval, otherworldly cosmos.

Much like the Parisian artist and theoretician Daniel Buren, whose installation was recently at UAM, Saret feels that "the major challenge for contemporary art is not in the creation of a new art form, but a new context for the entire endeavor of art." That progressive view of art-making, in combination with idealism for a new social order, is particularly admirable. Yet, in his sculptures the mystical quest for the essence of a material is, ironically, similar to the formalist dictum that art limit itself to exploration of the intrinsic properties of a medium. Perhaps that is the source of the transitory satisfaction of Saret's wiry forms - the result is less successful as transformation of the visionary into the visible than it is as transfiguration of form into formalism.