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## ART: MOSKOWITZ'S VIEW OF SCULPTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL ICONS

ROBERT MOSKOWITZ uses the pictorial conventions of late modernism as tools for artistic, emotional and psychological exploration. In the course of working the surface, flattening shape, analyzing line and developing the relationship between figure and ground, Moskowitz gets inside the image. When his paintings are most successful, it is impossible to tell whether he has been making a painting about a familiar image or monument or whether the image or monument has been making a painting about him.

Moskowitz's current show - at the Blum Helman Gallery, 20 West 57th Street, through March 1 - includes new material. The one horizontal painting, whose subject grows out of 19th-century works by Frederic Edwin Church and Caspar David Friedrich, is called "Iceberg." There is a painting and also a pastel drawing inspired by a devastated World War I landscape in the film "The Razor's Edge." The most recent painting, of a red cross, also leads back to the Great War - to the wartime role of the Red Cross and to the Suprematism of Kasimir Malevich.

The show includes one painting and one pastel drawing of four sculptural icons. Moskowitz has worked previously with Brancusi's "Bird in Space" and Rodin's "Thinker." His involvement with Myron's "Diskobolos" and Giacometti's "Standing Woman" is new. In each instance, Moskowitz pares away, scrapes down, reduces three-dimensional objects to shadow and silhouette. One of his goals is to reach a level of obsession, association and dream that can reveal why these objects are so loaded with meaning.

The "Giacometti Pieces" suggest how Moskowitz's

idiosyncratic approach can lead to a merging of subject and object. Moskowitz elongates the small frontal figure in a way that echoes the spatial stretching that is so essential to the scale of many of Giacometti's standing figures. One effect of making both the figurine and the space around it black is to identify the absoluteness of Giacometti with the absoluteness of Ad Reinhardt. The thin zip of the figurine in space reminds us of the link between Giacometti and another artist Moskowitz admires, Barnett Newman.

The black on black also gives the Giacometti a sense more of absence than of presence, which is appropriate to an artist so concerned with the relation between being and nothingness. In the pastel, the white figurine becomes, in effect, a hole in space. This, too, is appropriate to a sculptor who sometimes seems to have modeled not the human figure but the space around it. Even the peculiar red drips, above and below the figurine in Moskowitz's painting, make sense. They breathe into the blackness and immobility something of the desire that was one of Giacometti's basic subjects.

The density of Moskowitz's work is partly the result of the way the paring away of the image is combined with looming verticality. The most vertical image in the show is "Skyscraper III," a nine-foot-tall diptych of the World Trade Center. While we might have expected the two dark towers to be painted with vertical strokes, the strokes are primarily horizontal. While we might have expected the naked red space around the towers to have been painted with horizontal strokes, they are essentially vertical.

The effect is strange and hypnotic. The surging totems push through space slowly but irresistibly, and with more than a little malevolence. The black strips suggesting sides of the building give the architecture the glitzy formality of tuxedos - which encourages us to identify the buildings with the human figure and with ourselves. Works like these are meeting places between figure and landscape, familiar and unknown, dawn and night. Also of interest this week: Ross Bleckner (Mary Boone-Michael Werner Gallery, 417 West Broadway, near Spring Street): Ross Bleckner's compelling paintings come out of 17th-century still-lives, Romanticism and Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice." Everything in this glittering, nocturnal world of surfaces and reflections seems ephemeral and transient. Everything is penetrated with a sense of illusion, decay and death - a sense that is the source both of desire and rage.

Although the paintings are filled with light, there is often a veil. We enter images of ballrooms, canals, still lifes and urns - the urn is a traditional inspiration for meditations on time, glory and death - but we are also irrevocably removed. The glistening surfaces turn the paintings into mirrors. As with Manet's "Bar at the Folies Bergere," Bleckner wants to involve us directly and obliquely. He wants us to feel that the immediate, but fading world we are looking at is a reflection of ourselves.

As accomplished as these paintings are, they raise questions. One of the biggest has to do with an apparent tension between the artist's knowledge of and tenderness for a culture of which he is very much a part, and the conviction that this culture is in the twilight of its existence and deserves to be brought to its knees. (Through Feb. 22.) Barbara Kruger (Annina Nosei Gallery, 100 Prince Street): The work of Barbara Kruger has changed. She is still working primarily with photographs of photographs blown up and then decorated, stabbed and splashed with words that express a political point of view. Kruger is still fearless in her attack on situations and ways of thinking and acting that can trap men and women.

This may be her first one-person show, however, that uses a full range of color. The show includes the first picture the artist has done that consists entirely

of words. It also includes lenticular photographs - superimposed photographic images that shift back and forth according to the light.

The most striking change is the obvious pleasure in making these works. Kruger's increased confidence and playfulness gives her irony a greater range. It also makes it easier to focus not only on specific content, but also on the psychology and politics involved in the composition of popular imagery, about which the artist knows a good deal. With this show, Kruger can move in any number of directions. (Through March 2.) Sculpture for Public Spaces (Marisa del Re Gallery, 41 East 57th Street): The most important aspect of this exhibition about public sculpture is its lack of dogmatism. The organizer is Harriet Senie, a knowledgeable figure about public sculpture, who has spoken consistently of the need for a more enlightened official view of art education. The show consists of models for 11 very different works - by Karel Appel, Arman, Scott Burton, Nancy Holt, Patricia Johanson, Claes Oldenburg-Coosje van Bruggen, Mimmo Paladino, Arnaldo Pomodoro, George Segal, Richard Serra and Elyn Zimmerman.

Some works, like those of Appel and Paladino, are models waiting for a commission. Others, such as those by Burton and Segal, are models for projects that are under way. Senie makes her argument for an open-minded approach by including artists as different as Zimmerman and Serra. "Keystone Island" reflects Zimmerman's wish to create a distinct, often contemplative sculptural environment. In contrast, Serra's model for a sculpture that was recently installed in front of the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, reflects a commitment to work that can orient and humanize an environment by imposing itself upon it. (Through March 1.) Chuck Forsman (Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 41 West 57th Street): Painting in a realistic, narrative style, Chuck Forsman explores the evolving relationship between human beings and the natural world. His images and light were drawn from his home state of Colorado. The paintings have a smooth, seamless quality that seems to blend in with the landscape, but there are often pictorial gestures that stand out and remind us that what we are looking at is artifice.

There are few people in Forsman's prairies and canyons, but there is always a human presence. That presence is both part of and removed from nature. Roads sweep through the hills, echoing the movements and rhythms of the earth, but they are distinct from it in texture and scale. Houses may have the geometry of the land, but they are small and fortresslike. Cars no larger than toys huddle close together as they chug off toward the mountains. As alluring as a river seems, the shadow of a fence still indicates the human need for protection.

Even when people swim in an idyllic pocket of water, they do not fully belong there. They are introspective and solitary. They recall Renaissance paintings of baptisms and expulsions from paradise, where the human figure tended to dominate the land. In Forsman's work, however, the subject matter and means of painting both insist upon the link between human beings and nature and break it. Forsman leads us to that threshold between the human and natural worlds, and he makes us think hard about why the prospect of crossing it arouses such desire and fear. (Through March 1.)