

recapitulated Pearson's meandering linear style not only in conventional rectangular formats, but also on circular canvases and on metal and papier-mâché spheres. The remaining body of work dated from 1983-84 and explored a set of artistic concerns of an entirely different order. If anything ties the various strands of Pearson's art together, it is the surfaces: hard and smooth, with the appearance of a polypasting movement across them. One regretted that transitional works were not also included in the show.

One of the most powerful examples of the early work was *Earth Script* (1973), a large, circular painting 5½ feet in diameter. This brick-red disk is crossed diagonally by hundreds of dark, wavy lines. By varying slightly the spacing and direction of the lines as they meander across the canvas, the artist has here created the illusion of ripples. One might at first be reminded of flowing water, desert sand or wind-blown wheat, but finally none of these images are satisfactory because the work is not representational. The effect remains stubbornly two-dimensional, as if the pigment itself were impregnated with an undulating graininess.

Pearson arrived at this approach to painting in part through his experiences as a cartographer during World War II, when he studied Japanese survey maps and drew simplified versions of their topographical lines. In fact, the insistent repetition in his linear paintings in some mysterious way suggests a sensibility more oriental than Western, and in this regard recalls Mark Tobey, who was also influenced by Eastern thought. Pearson's military experience may have inspired him to extend his system of linear surface articulation to spherical forms, as some of his pieces resemble globes.

Coincident with his work in the relatively restricted palette of one quiet surface color—for example, a sienna or an ochre, covered with dark lines—Pearson was experimenting with very bright hues. In *Alcan Version* (1972), the colors are nearly psychedelic.

The paintings from the early '80s, though equally involved with surface, have an entirely different look. Here, emphasis on line gives way to preoccupation with edge. Flat, overlapping, severely rectilinear forms fill rectangular or square canvases. Two of the pieces, *Three Pricks* and an



Broto, *Le Juif*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 106½ by 119½ inches; at Germans van Eck.

Orange and Madame Recamer (both 1984), are squares divided into checkerboard patterns. A Mondrian-like quality emerges here, though the potency and contrast of colors are uniquely Pearson's: Dark squares interact with brightly colored ones, creating syncopated rhythms and abrupt changes or interruptions of movement.

The remainder of the late geometric painting was composed of works from the "Sweeney" series. Five narrow, rectangular canvases filled with emblematic forms were hung side by side. Inspired by an ancient Irish myth, each of these pieces has a title that refers to either a person or an event in the story. However, the works are not illustrations, whatever allusions to the narrative they might contain. These canvases are made up of blocks, bars and chevrons of intense color that interlock with a light exactitude. Their visible quality is enhanced by rectangular, box-like forms at the top and bottom of each work. Remarkable is the way that the forms hold to the surface without creating depth.

Even in this limited retrospective, Pearson displayed considerable artistic range. Whether using vibrating line or brilliant color, his energy and precision infused his work with a sense of power that always transcended the merely decorative.

—Walter Thompson

Broto at Germans van Eck

Part of the recent Spanish invasion, Broto (he goes by a single name) stakes out the area where representation and abstraction meet. Against rich, atmospheric grounds suggestive of landscape, he lays abstract forms that hint mysteriously at recognizable objects. These latter are modeled in an almost sculptural manner in thick concentrations of glossy paint. Sometimes the forms are overlaid with darker drips so that they begin to fade into the ground; at other times they lie congealed on the surface, like an oil slick on a pool of water.

Despite Broto's obvious ambiguity, many of these paintings are near masses. The brooding symbolism, achieved through heightened color and dramatic contrasts between figure and ground, is the stuff of epic drama, and in fact the artist fits with such mythic themes as the battle between chaos and order, or the emergence of life from primordial ooze. However, in too many cases the drama seems forced, the colors overly intense, the juxtapositions overblown.

Nor is the paint application always satisfying. The blue ground of *Faigo* sets off a vivid orange-red ring whose ragged edges leap up like tongues of fire. A flat brown mass with an undulating contour hugs the top

of the canvas. Bold red ring and brown mass are formed with a paint so bolt-up that they seem detachable, and this lack of integration ultimately undermines the drama inherent in the symbolism of the fiery ring.

Such sculptural layering is more successful in *La Muzilla*, where a black wash forms the ground for a ghostly white grid that brings to mind both modernist architecture and Minimalist sculpture. Lightly veiled by drips of black paint, the white lines of the grid begin to dematerialize. The "detachable" elements in this painting are several bars of red and brown, obviously painted with the canvas upside down, so that the edges seem to drip upward. Here, the thick glossiness of the overlays works within the overall composition, turning the streaks of color into flame-like bursts which adhere to the grid structure like unbidden agents of destruction.

Other paintings contain images that suggest figures, baskets and cages, generally raised like bas-reliefs from the atmospheric grounds. The battle between abstraction and representation, and the emphasis on sensuous surface and the physicality of paint, are qualities that Broto shares with other slightly younger Spanish painters like Miguel Barcelo and Jose Maria Sicilia. However, he has not yet achieved the uneasy reconciliation of surface and image, abstract form and referent that generally marks their work.

—Eleanor Hartney

Alison Wilding at MOMA

Since the '60s, contemporary sculpture has, in the main, moved toward the physically obvious. Bold and discernible styles have found favor over subtle ones; catchy materials, physical bulk and easily identified imagery have dominated. Alison Wilding, however, goes against this tendency, making work remarkable for the time and attention it demands as well as for its quiet sensuality. Though physically simple, her sculptures are perceptually and emotionally complex. She works in a less programmatic mode than her better-known British compatriots, such as Allington, Cragg, Deacon, Gormley and Woodrow, and the resulting pieces are commensurately more difficult to convey in words.

Wilding exhibited three small wall sculptures and four larger freestanding ones in the Modern's Projects Room. The works spanned four years and demonstrated her steady mastering of materials and form. *Shady 1*, a 1983 wall piece, feels both overworked and a bit thin, the simplicity of its gesture at odds with the preciousness of the painted surface. But the most recent wall piece, *Plunder* (1987), beautifully resolves Wilding's central challenge: to balance the metaphoric power of objects and the muteness of materials.

Like many of her sculptures, *Plunder* brings together two materials having different density, light and texture. Wilding carved a three-lobed elliptical funnel out of black walnut and then literally stuffed it with pristine Irish linen. The cloth comes to suggest carved stone drapery, classical and coolly distant. The wooden container has the warmth of flesh, evoking hips and crotch, so that the whole suggests the disturbing image of a garment inhabiting a body rather than covering it. No single imagistic reading prevails.

In her floor sculptures Wilding fashions spaces that are set apart from the viewer but kept wholly accessible to the eye. Even when she makes a complete enclosure, as in *Into the Light*, where a three-foot-high circular wall surrounds a shorter wooden phallic form, she maintains the flow between the interior and the exterior by piercing the wall with numerous irregular peepholes, and by sizing it so that we look down *into* the enclosure as well.

Wilding's material of choice is sheet metal. Once curved, it stands without extraneous support; it has visual weight but little actual mass. The works thus remain fluid regardless of size, and form is never blocked by the requirements of its making. The 7-foot-high *Hearth* evokes a bishop's miter, a cloak or a bell; it is assembled out of two tall curved triangles joined by a loop at their summits. Opening mostly toward the front, though in the back a narrow gap between the two faces also gives passage, *Hearth* makes the viewer doubly conscious of light—both as an attribute of space, in the penumbra of the work's interior, and as a quality of materials and surfaces. The leaded steel sheet, rubbed with pigments and linseed oil, has a translucent depth outside,



Barbara Kruger's hanging of photographs by Hamuth Rodchenko and Bogi-Ancré, 1987, at the Museum of Modern Art.



Alison Wilding: *Slow Core*, 1985-87, leaded steel, bronze and rubber, 6 feet 3 inches high; at the Museum of Modern Art.

while the inside has a velvety quality. Each decision in the making of the piece is clearly visible and left undisguised. The strength of *Hearth* lies less in the images it calls forth than in the subtlety of its off-kilter balance,

and its play of light. Like Wilding's best work, it summons up associational imagery, not as an aim in itself, but as a by-product of its formal working-out.

—Anne Rochette and
Wade Saunders

"Picturing 'Greatness'" at MOMA

The quotation marks slipped like handcuffs around "greatness" in the title of the exhibition (to Mar 29) of portrait photographs of artists, organized by Barbara Kruger, provided a preliminary clue to its skeptical tone. As part of a special program of activities intended to herald an eventual reconciliation between MOMA and the contemporary arts, Kruger was invited by Susan Krimm, a curator in the Department of Photography, to assemble a small show from the museum's collection. Offered a free hand, full cooperation and an almost instant deadline, Kruger explored the MOMA photography holdings for a week before hitting upon her theme. She chose approximately 40 images—portraits of artists such as Rodin, Monet and Picasso, by photographers including Steichen, Man Ray, August Sander and Arnold Newman—and set them in a gallery that was dominated by a monumental, floor-to-ceiling wall text bracketed between her trademark red borders.

Both the museum and the artist apparently conceived the installation as an open-ended exercise, a chance to bring to bear on the collection a critical imagination markedly different from that of MOMA's own curators. Thus the museum's customary focus on the aesthetics of photography was noticeably absent—the images Kruger presented were by no means ill, or even mostly, "great" photographs. What was provided instead, in portraits ranging in date from 1882 to 1956, was a pointed lesson in the lack of (predominantly male) artistic "greatness" during the period of heroic modernism, with special emphasis on the way the camera helped to package the notion for popular consumption.

In 11 clusters of prints, Kruger suggested various recipes for depicting "greatness": alluded to in her wall text as "that heady brew concocted with a slice of visual pleasure, a pinch of condescension, a mention of myth, and a dollop of money." The range of alternative self-images available to the artist—in our culture, a figure usually taken to epitomize stubborn individuality—was frankly rendered by Kruger as a limited variety of standard brands: dandified aesthete, self-lover of creation, etc. In this regard it is probably no accident that the opening group of three similarly