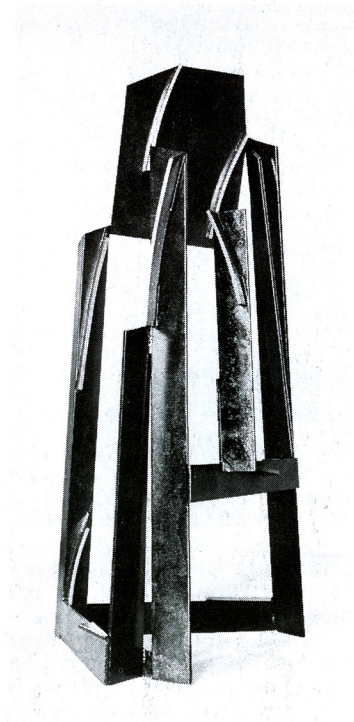


soned artist at the height of his powers. Employing brass, copper, steel and a brass-steel alloy, Ferber evidenced a concern with color which in two cases he furthered by the use of paint—Indian red for one piece, storm-sky blue for the other.

The three large, person-sized works—*Canaan II*, *Furnace II*, and *Mill River II*—are truly multi-sided, offering radically different configurations from face to face so that the viewer is urged to move around them. The small, vertical cages—*Homage to Piranesi VIII* (36 by 22½ by 20 inches) and *Homage to Piranesi IX* (39 by 21 by 18 inches)—address themselves much more to the movement of the eye than of the body, for, like Piranesi's prints, these intimate pieces are monumental forms constrained in compacting containers. The new, horizontal cages—*Pisgah II* and *Cleft II*—are more pictorial and, when nestling by walls as in this installation, suggest three-dimensional paintings.

Furnace II was the show's pivotal work, although at first glance it seemed more modest than the others. (Ferber's art has frequently been rather low key.) Its matte finish lacks the seductiveness of its shinier companions. While rhythmically-linked circular elements dominated on one side, from another prominent vantage point its bold angularity set it apart from the other works. Several sculptures have units which were torn apart so that other elements could be inserted into these resulting slits.

This new device was not used in *Furnace II*. Yet this 1974-77 work encapsulates procedures the artist has used throughout his career. Here we found both geometric and biomorphic shapes; clean edges but irregular lines; a non-primary color; a circle not closing upon itself but terminating instead in a different plane from the



Joel Perlman: *Long Line*; at Emmerich.

one in which it begins; shadows cast by planes more often tilted than positioned perpendicularly to the ground; and flanges which lip most broad passages. This is a centrifugal work which draws attention away from its center. There are, in addition, two principal views so unlike each other it is difficult to believe that they belong to the same structure. The more open side, the one with the circular elements, runs close to the ground and the four parts feed into one another horizontally. The second face, located at a right angle to the other one, is

dominated by a triangular configuration with a long, diagonally projecting top. Where a curvaceous chunk was cut from one side of the triangle a negative space asserts itself as much as the solid steel does.

Ferber had his first one-man show in December 1937, and in his current work he has incorporated—probably unconsciously—elements from the various styles which he has explored during a 40-year career. From the work of the '30s, much influenced by the medieval statues in George Grey Barnard's collection, traces of the Michelangelesque have survived: rippling muscles have been transformed into disquieting, contorted, sinuous lines. The figure groups of the '40s are recalled by the way individual shapes in the new works meld into one another, and the horizontal spread of certain pieces can be related to a mid-'40s Moore influence.

Ferber, in the course of his long career, has mastered a lot of craft procedures, some no longer practiced by avant-gardists. While many of Ferber's contemporaries still work with motifs and manners which established their reputations years ago, he has admirably continued to digest his previous concerns and move on, consequently getting better and better. —Phyllis Tuchman

Willard Boepple at Acquavella; Joel Perlman at Emmerich

In 1972 Willard Boepple and Joel Perlman were included in "Five Sculptors From Bennington," a group show at Emmerich's downtown gallery heralding a third generation of artists working with welded steel. Their sculpture did not and does not look alike. But the assumptions underlying their early work—that sculp-

ture is solely about the articulation of space and that the look of a piece is to be argued only within the piece—are still shared by Boepple and Perlman. Each has tried to elbow out some space in the crowd.

Boepple cuts shapes out of flat steel plate and then bends, even tears the elements on a brake to give them volume. He can make any form he wants. Nothing of his has industrial regularity or the sharp, 90-degree edges of an extrusion.

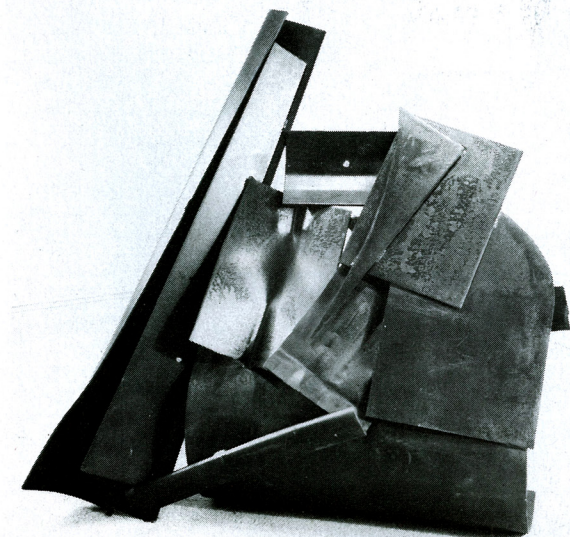
His small pieces are intense, solid, layered up from the center. A steel sheet is draped over or around each work, closing off the inside so that interior forms are lost to view and we see only their edges. Boepple's simultaneous use of open and closed form is refreshing, for while we are used to one part momentarily blocking our view of another in welded steel sculpture, the more radical obscurity he introduces in these pieces is unfamiliar.

The larger sculptures are frontal, relaxed, less original. Leaning away from us, they are like cards dealt out, picked up and loosely arranged. Boepple uses the flat expanse of plane or a running, almost linear edge to keep his compositions together, to cool out energetic passages. His layout and ploys have been used before.

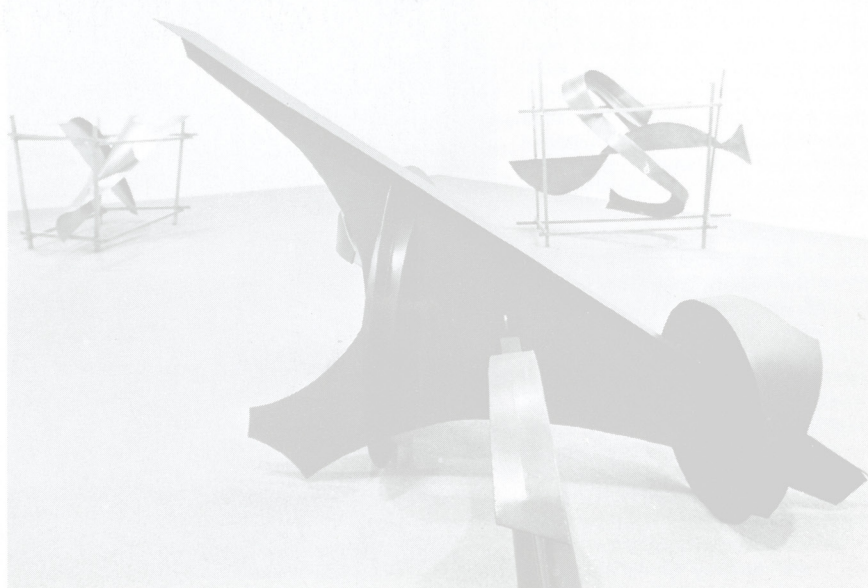
In the past few years Joel Perlman's sculptures have suggested gates or doorways. The pieces were frontal, adult-sized and open in the center. Jagged posts supported fractured lintels. He has kept the open center but has made these new works very vertical while laying quirky visual movements over a somewhat static partitioning of space.

Perlman refers to architecture, not to landscape, and you still look through his pieces rather than across them. He goes vertical without a qualm: often the most massive ele-

Willard Boepple: *Buffet Flat for Jenny*, welded steel, 53 by 51 by 24 inches; at Acquavella.



Herbert Ferber: *left to right Cleft II*, 1977-78, *Furnace II*, 1974-76, *Pisgah II*, 1970-76; at Knoedler.



ments are set at the top. In fact, several of the pieces look cast down from above—one is called *Pick Up Sticks*. They seem transfixed, as though frozen in motion by a flash. They touch for a moment, then draw apart, and you never feel gravity pulling down.

Though still not in the round, the pieces now have several layers. Space is carefully apportioned and held almost still within them, but without any boxiness. To inflect the pieces Perلمان welds narrow, curved strips onto the stable, mostly vertical planes. He paints the near edge of some strips brown, to bring them forward from the otherwise black sculptures. The arcs connect to one another, set currents moving through a piece, and live up the planar expanses. The strips are charming because they effectively integrate the sculptures with the surrounding space, while remaining spare and economical. —Wade Saunders

Robert Grosvenor at Paula Cooper

Robert Grosvenor's most recent show, a deliberate lunge against the constraints of '60s Minimalism, was at once unexpected and fully consistent with the rugged, deftly mediated physicality evident in his solitary wood and metal pieces of 1971–76. These two new works, rafts of creosoted beams riveted fixedly together, are as darkly massive—and as hauntingly allusive—as the sarcophagi of state heroes.

Built of immense beams similar to those mechanically twisted and broken in Grosvenor's earlier work, the new sculptures have also been cautiously reshaped. With a small chainsaw, the artist has scooped and trenched, has in fact sculpted, the surfaces of each piece to create a set of stately, intricately balanced proportions alien to—while strangely and seductively evocative of—the original rough configuration of his wooden material. This gingerly reshaping process, prolonged over a period of a year, exposes both the frailty and the fibrous toughness of the wood. Here, the sculptor's machinery has been applied not to a disruption of the wood's internal structure, as in Grosvenor's previous wrenched and tortured pole pieces, but to a formal conversion of its visible contours.

Both new pieces rise with a kind of savage majesty from ground level to float a new horizontal plane three feet above the gallery floor. This height, by ordinary standards, is humble, even mean; but in the case of these stacked and bolted beams, it is alarming and awesome. The bulky component beams have been joined lengthwise with steel bolts in a manner so forcible and patterned that the sculptor's fusing and reinforcing intention becomes inescapable. The deeply recessed bolts, half secreted within the wood's substance, safeguard the integrity of either piece

against future accident and change. Like the formidable, imperial size of the constructions and like their thick, resistant creosote coating, the bolting seems designed to protect the work from pettiness and ephemerality.

As constructions, the new sculptures veer cleanly and recuperatively away from what, in Grosvenor's floor-bound single-beam pieces, seems a flirtation, however wary or measured, with severe formal reduction. His new works experiment openly with relational complexity yet do not overthrow or belie the Minimalist precept of a bold simplicity of form. The beams and their wavy irregular surfaces are powerfully contained within a giant geometrical solid, locked within a wood structure that is itself a tightly bolted, indivisible unit. Grosvenor's sculptural statements remain, despite their new internal complication, as blunt and unminced as ever.

The larger sculpture consists of 18 beams, the smaller of nine. The larger, the same height as its companion piece, is four feet longer than and precisely double the width of the smaller. Yet these dimensions are deceptive: because of the calculated difference in the way their surfaces are carved, the two pieces match each other both in visual impact and suggestive power. The smaller piece, with its carefully beveled bread-loaf convexity seems to strain upward, terminating in a slight dome; while the larger piece, its upper surface delicately hollowed into a shallow trough, sags back against its own supportive mass. Both sculptures tease us with their atmosphere of mysterious, long-foregone purpose and, beyond that, point toward a reluctant and submerged symbolism. What we objectively encounter in

each piece appears the consequence of a premeditated response to wooden materials, to their intrinsic physical limitations. Yet, oddly, what compels us in these works—their mythic dimensions, their sloped and worn surfaces, the bruising deep-set bolts, the sticky saturation of creosote—gives the slip to any straightforward material analysis. These pieces are, finally, extraordinarily expressive: as if we stood face-to-face with the huge, use-hallowed furniture of an extinct race.

—Prudence Carlson

"The Male Nude" at Marcuse Pfeifer

This show has been pretty well trounced by the press, from John Ashbery's sniggering epigram in *New York Magazine* to a ludicrous piece in *The Village Voice*: "... a man's body doesn't lend itself to abstraction like a woman's." It's as if they were talking about grapes and pots. This is tantamount to saying that half the world is inappropriate subject matter. An almost moral concern like this strikes a quaintly Victorian note, exactly opposite to the Victorian attitude that got Eakins in trouble for taking pictures of naked but masked ladies. They thought naked men were okay in those days. Nowadays he'd get it for the ones of boys at the old swimming hole. I think what shocked Philadelphia was that his models, both male and female, were all young and beautifully shaped in contradistinction to the "artistic" nude which had to be obese to arouse higher thought, whatever that was supposed to mean.

Let's face it, a picture of a nude will always have sex as its real subject, no matter how artily abstracted. It's

just one of the things that distinguishes a photo from a painting—photos have a greater capacity for arousing and disturbing.

This show was disturbing. There was more than just a suppressed sigh of sexuality, and a lot of unadulterated raunchiness. One had the sense sometimes of being caught in the daylight with somebody from the night before. There isn't much tradition or literature for men as a source of erotic musings. In fact, there is something down-right unnatural about elevating (or debasing) men to sex symbols. Women are the traditionally decorative half of humanity and men the functional. It seems to upset the gross national image to promote men's bodies as something pretty. People seem to feel threatened by a man's sex. It is, unlike a woman's, overt. But don't men's genitals have a certain anomalously decorative look, like an accessory thrown in to be amusing, to decorate the finished product like an earring? I think it's the tacked-on look that bothers people.

Jane Austen wrote that "One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other." The show had a heavy atmosphere of homosexuality and incest. Jacqueline Livingston's touching and erotic (to say the least) series of her 11-year-old son Sam is a real shocker. Peter Hujar's series of his friend Robert done with an almost Egyptian frontality shows the model blowing himself, an amusing idea not at all funny here, and sitting around displaying his apparently enormous euphemism. Hujar's work is not for the timid. For the timid we were shown a lot of old photos printed on those beautiful emulsions that lend the von Gloedens, Curtises, Kings, Kuhns (a dorsal view

Robert Grosvenor: *Untitled*, 1977-78, wood, 3 by 6 by 11 feet; at Paula Cooper.

