

# Review of Exhibitions



Bruce Robbins: See-Saws, 1978, aluminum channel, wood, metal hydrocal and steel mesh, installation of 29 parts; at Truman.

## NEW YORK

### Bruce Robbins at Truman

Bruce Robbins exhibited painted seesaws this past season. Crowded inside the gallery were 29 same-sized sculptures. In each, a loosely engineered board rests on a functional fulcrum. The rich-looking boards measure 84 inches long, 3 inches wide, and just under an inch thick. Robbins has constructed them of aluminum channel, internally trussed and then complexly sandwiched with wood and other materials. The fulcrums—7 inches square at bottom, 6 inches high, equilateral in cross section—are made of hydro-

cal and steel mesh with a metal plate that acts as the load-bearing edge. He has positioned each fulcrum under the middle of its board, for symmetry and against stability. We can easily rock or displace the boards. Cross-bars divide each board's upper surface into ten sections. Painting them enforces these divisions and isolates board from base. Robbins is able to paint without tackling the compositional problems traditional to painting.

The sculptures are made from the same materials as Robbins' ladders and runged planks—shown last year—which leaned against the wall. The new pieces look like a rail of a ladder separated off and turned side-

ways, or like a narrow strip cut from the runged planks. The ladders are said to be "mystical," mediating heaven and earth. Connecting the seesaws back to the ladders is somehow more important than deciding what the relation actually is. The new sculptures again appear obsessive and suggestive. By constructing the pieces in the complicated ways he does, Robbins asks us to accept the value of his embodied labor. If we do (and nothing argues we must), the pieces disclose successive strata, buried layers of intention.

The pieces belong to the family of levers, seesaws and scales, things in which one end must fall for the other

to rise. A lever directs, focuses and multiplies the power of a force. It is a tool for moving things. Levers await an object—a mover and a moved. Seesaws enforce equivalence: only in concert with a partner of equal mass can you move up and down. It is the absence of a power relation that makes seesaws fun, at least for children. We can also see the sculptures as balance scales, with which quantities of all sorts are weighed and so judged one against another. As Heraclitus said, "The way up and the way down are the same."

The installation was both gorgeous and problematic. Robbins crowded the sculptures in together, making it hard to see any single piece. The in-

stallation suggested that there is a noumenal lever, of which the sculptures are at best approximations. This ideal would account for the geometric perfection of the base and for the boards sharing size, spine and division, but differing in layering and color. But what of a solitary piece seen away from the group? A narrow board rests on a chunky fulcrum; it is unexciting sculpture and simple painting. A single piece lacks context and content. It is but a shadow of the installation, a trace of some absent whole.

—Wade Saunders

## Patrick Ireland at the School of Visual Arts

Patrick Ireland's recent show (re-called the string sculpture he has shown at 112 Greene St., among other places. And that's some certain echoes of the articles he published, a couple of seasons back, on the underlying premises of the core with members that gadden have become in the last 25 years. Ireland writes under the name Egan O'Doherty. The fact that his pen name is his given name suggests just how complex a personage he is. His string pieces, worked as sculpture, yet seemed to be evading the sculptural condition in two ways simultaneously. First of all, they were extremely alienated physical presences, poised on the edge of invisibility. Next, they were colored in ways that made some reference to certain issues of edge and line in painting. There were strings—in, rather, ropes—in this installation piece at SVA. They de-nuded pieces in the air, some curved, some angular. At any rate, the frames of painting and the forms of sculpture were suggested, and a line with Ireland's similar work was made.

If you stood at a certain point in the SVA gallery and looked in the right direction, you saw one of the ropes outline an area of color painted directly on the white gallery wall. Then you moved up to one of these other satellite points, each marked by marking tape. It's on the rug, then which another rope performed the same function with another color, and so on. From the back of the gallery space, ten ropes were brought into play. When the eye got into position, ten extremely peculiar color areas suddenly sliced into a blanked relationship with the installation's length of space. The artist's gestures were suddenly all solvent, and the exhibition space was filled with an atmosphere of radicality achieved. But of course the achievement was never in doubt, for Ireland's logic flows knowingly in a circle. The pieces of the puzzle are all definitions of one another. This is what results from O'Doherty's articles on the way our exhibition spaces have tended to define the right of what they exhibit.

It's tempting to say in this poem that O'Doherty's critical points are supported by Patrick Ireland's art—they are, after all, the work of the same



Patrick Ireland: *Assemblage*, 1978, colored rope, zinc and hanging base, at the School of Visual Arts

person, and this might seem to make the entire exercise into a series of self-supporting circularities. But Ireland-O'Doherty provides at every point in the structure of his complex arguments a license for someone else—the viewer, the possessor of an eye or a mind—to intervene. In fact, the artist challenges you to do so, and the challenge is the important content of his art. In the SVA piece, Ireland implicated you in the process by which sculpture and painting entered each others' territory and both mediums show themselves hard put to hold out their own claims against those of the exhibition space—the territory whose very nature it is to turn aggressively on what it contains. Ireland wants to show his hyper-conscious sense of responsibility for the state of affairs, and in this piece he succeeded. The very process of per-

ceiving it informed you of the fact that our culture's assumptions and values originate in the experience of individuals—as is each one of us. This was a participatory piece with a vengeance.

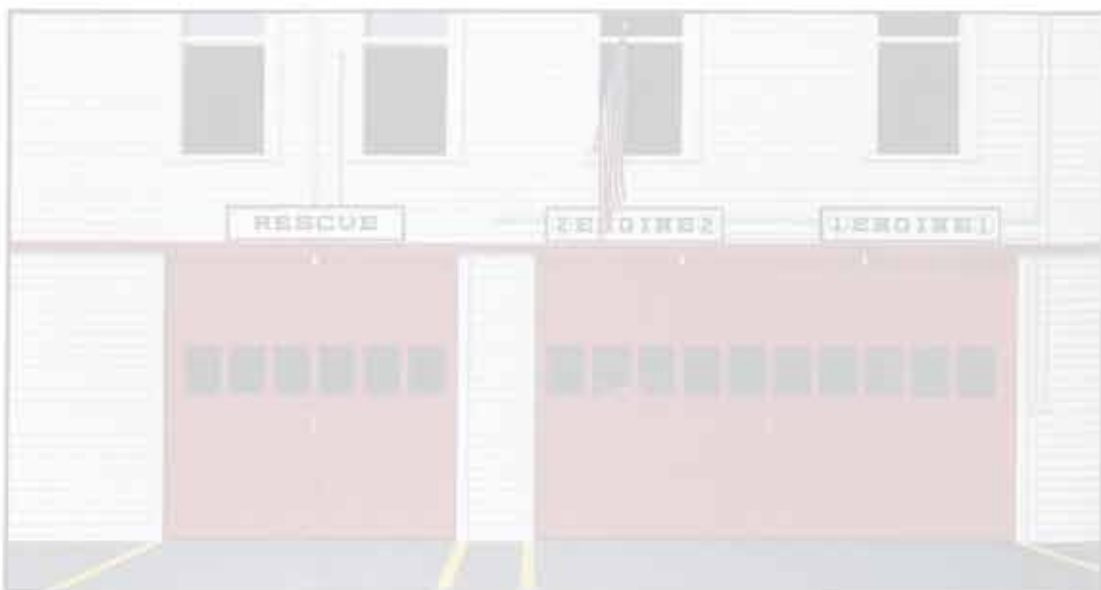
—Carter Burwell

## Budd Hopkins at Andre Zarre and Lerner-Heller

Budd Hopkins' show at Zarre went from 1968 to 1969, at Lerner-Heller the centerpiece was a large, grand-new, multi-panel work called *Hex Motel*. Most of the works at Zarre were small, cruddy paintings, with a few black-and-white collages from 1964-66; with the help of several large canvases, they documented very clearly a major shift in the painter's style. In fact, the show was dominat-

ed by its narrative thrust, its story of willed education seamlessly maintained; as Hopkins took Action Painting into an accommodation with hard-edged form, Dadasis (and better than that), Symbolist postals showed how the mind forces sense even onto random collections of words or images. The difficulty in the Zarre exhibition was in preventing the crowd from making too much sense too quickly. The pattern of Hopkins' season-to-season development was so clear that it was difficult to see individual paintings—though, singled out, many of them stood up well. Hopkins' version of Action Painting is extremely rich.

The earlier works at Zarre show brushstrokes built up and suggestions of landscapes. There's very little accommodation to the edges of the canvases. These early, free-floating



Budd Hopkins: *Engine Compares 1 & 2*, 1967, oil on 74 inches at Penton. Photo by G. Ial.