

Review of Exhibitions



Alain Kirili: *Commandment*, 1979, 26 freestanding pieces of forged iron, each 14½ inches high; at Sonnabend. Ludwig Collection.

NEW YORK

Alain Kirili at Sonnabend

Sculptor Alain Kirili has written well on unfashionable art. Contemporary French concerns are evident in his making art a carrier of religious and personal meanings, his exploring the psychological matrix of a work, his strong claim for the craftsman's touch and sign. His own work is nourished by his study of French psychologist Jacques Lacan and structured by his eccentric knowledge of history. He appreciates the significant and the expressive in handicraft traditions. Of blacksmithing he has written, "It is the pulsation of handmade marks on the surface that allows the emergence of the

artist's subconscious."

Kirili recently exhibited two related groups of pieces, *Verticals I to V* and *Commandment*. The verticals were comprised of a single, erect piece of two-inch-square or larger bar stock about eight feet long, bearing several mechanical forging marks of varying direction, depth and orientation at the upper end. The bottom of each shaft was twisted 45 degrees from the rest of the shaft and welded to the center of a two-element base, the parts of which generally slipped past each other like shuffling feet. The dark surface was both straightforward and mysterious. These sculptures connected to the French myth of the forge. Furnaces and forges are mythic places with their transforming heat. Though their light is demonic, their use is benign.

Commandment touched on the con-

struction, differentiation and manipulation of signs. It was a nominally systematic group of 26 squat, welded steel pieces covering an area of the floor about ten feet square. The parts seemed to penetrate the floor. A few of the sculptures were found toolings for a machine or drop hammer—like that used in power forging the *Verticals*—and many of his other elements could be so used. Most had a stem or base of two-inch-square bar stock about eight inches long, chamfered at the bottom, though in some it was thicker or shorter. Almost all the pieces were quadrilaterally symmetrical; a couple weren't; half the parts incorporated a round element, with only two using the same diameter rod. Many of the sculptures were self-enclosing, but others were open, expansive.

The occupied area of floor felt set

apart, consecrated. Though the pieces were easy to walk between, you could find no right path, axis or point of view. Each element held a location. A unique form, looking like the peaked roof of a building or shrine, stood at the center of this suggestive alphabet: a single flat plate, like a tablet, secured one corner. The toolness, the gruff construction, and the thick surface kept the work physical.

The title *Commandment* refers to the Ten Commandments of Moses, and beyond to the 613 of the *Torah* describing a right locus of conduct. Kirili is interested in the transcendental—the exhibition announcement bore the letters "A.M.D.G."—Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, "To the Greater Glory of God"—and what he has done in this installation is set up something that becomes ineffable at

the very moment it seems within our ken. We glimpse but cannot grasp his order and meaning, and so begin to invest the pieces with the power of liturgic or symbolic objects. Finally there is no reason or persuasion here, just "the beauty and irrationality of hammering," the life of the subconscious. —Wade Saunders

Thornton Wildt at 55 Mercer

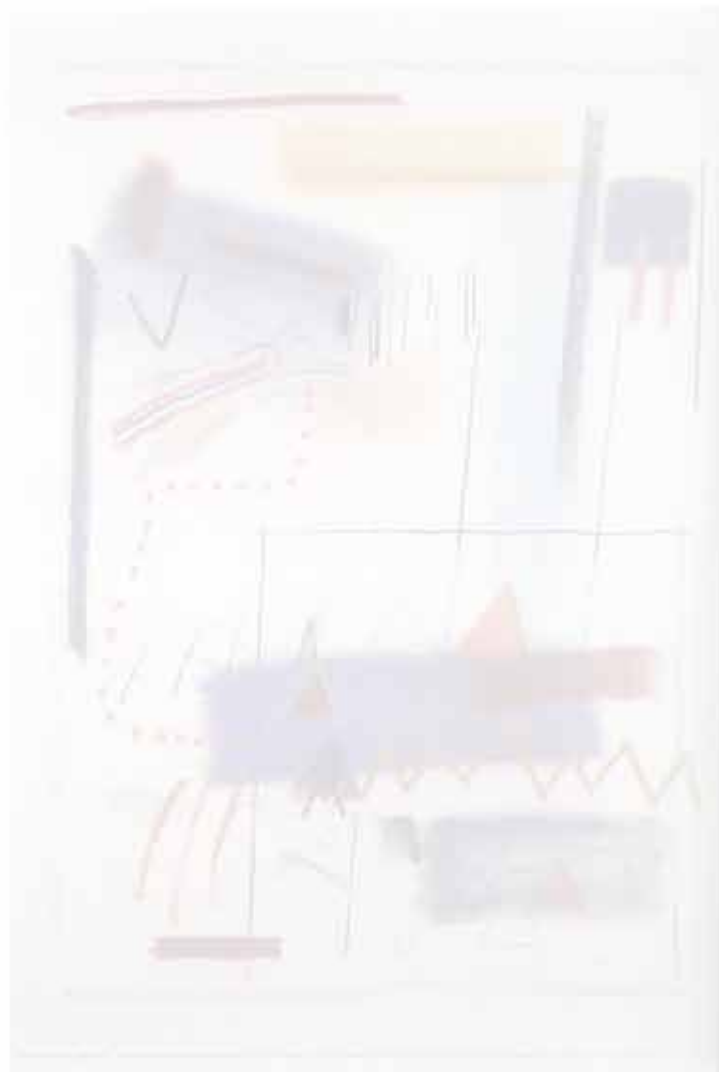
Ten years ago Thornton Wildt was one of three or four dozen Lyical Abstractionists, as they were called—young painters of a certain persuasion who reacted to the cynicism of Greenbergian color-field theory. Rather than seek the pure "optical" sought by Green, based as it, the Lyical Abstractionists related to the alien and alien of the Abstract Expressionists—but not, really, if you will, and then, a decade later, the coming of a young and of the Lyical Abstractionists who have survived and continue to do painting today. There are only a few. Most of the young painters currently accused of smelting Abstract Expressionism are very young, having appeared only in the last ten or fifteen years. That Wildt looks so old gives him the grand old man of a generation whose chief problem is not to move to grow up and strike out on his own, but to let it out the door. Wildt has moved and, in doing so, has achieved his independence.

The young taught procedures of early abstraction have coalesced with an already guttural expressive power to put the scales of the first-generation (postwar) (the looking and) torpority in a state of permanent revolt. As a consequence, most of the hard judgments

which in Wildt's direction are generally laid and that means not far at all, for possibly abstraction is above of a meter of spectacle, his independence allows some sufficient taste of a practitioner who, like Wildt, finds his style in a tradition possible rather than an academic canon, his achievement, then, is a consequence of the most tortured first-generation painter's intense feelings in the act of expressing them. Wildt truly the emphasis from doing to being. The sense grow of his "color" and "line" are evidence of his ability to sustain a state of both in his painting.

That Wildt's images possess a subtle, but not preoccupied and imperiously mislabeled as a Minimalist, but drawn with large, directive gestures from shades of cool (green and yellow), orange and blue) and tone (the straight edges and right angles of the ground versus various flat colors and acute angles). Rich in texture and in grandeur, there are depths of color which lay the eye in intensely fine directions. Wildt's close ties and ties with Greenbergian "objectivity" for a moment, they draw the mind and hand down to a contemplative state. There are echoes of Rothko's opacity here. Wildt has learned from the painter's grand scale and solemn stability. He has not, however, tried to copy or copy Rothko's talk in power and presence of an ultimate end. Wildt remains in the commanding state of joyful abstraction for his his personal meaning of the scale of his own creation, not that of supra-personal myth.

Once he falls in an expressive tradition is found, it's never to ask what Wildt expresses, but to ask, first-generation style, that is better. There may instead



Thornton Wildt, *Untitled* (1979), pastel on paper, 40 1/2 by 26 1/2 inches, at Knox.



Thornton Wildt, *Untitled* (1979), pastel on paper, 40 1/2 by 26 1/2 inches, at 55 Mercer.

be despoiled of a kind of the delicacy with which he handles the distance between tone and hue, in the ground of a painting, those colors, possibilities crowd together in the eye, leading to a sense, seeing feeling doubt in the matter's simplicity. Then there is a startling leap in the eye moves from ground to light, where an entire different set of complex appears. Wildt's paintings show stability and science in equal measure, hence he expresses, by stating facts, the feelings of one who, somewhat utopian, opposed extremes, his stability is serene, and severely drifts toward the quiet, keep one inner boundaries—between portly individual. These things are colored, with incipient pain, for the still both are extreme to another arena with a shock which Wildt must surely know is coming and put its eyes can never anticipate with total accuracy. It is these things which provide his "color" and "line" with the balanced, hand-to-hand edge.

—Cecil Riggall

Jaume Quick-To-See Smith at Kornblie

Jaume Quick-To-See Smith in his first solo show in New York, since a brief

synthesis from American Indian art of 20th-century modernism in his early landscapes—"Kallpa" and "Foggy Ridge." There were several shows from each side on view. All of his landscapes show certain elements having their source as much in his Indian roots—the idea of French Chief Shoshone depicted—as in the usual studies—his's current in the gallery. The art program of the Jewish, 21st Mexico.

What is Indian about the work, and if at all, that subject, the land and its bonding to the people and animals it stand on it. This, perhaps, he says, is an issue critical to the future of the Indian people and one which he is "caught up in." It is a statement which playing the story, one can understand his feelings about his already and land are given shape by certain forms which have, for his metaphorical images. For example, the names "Cloud" and "Foggy Ridge" are his 30 pieces of work in his exhibition, from the dynamic, textured, energetic, and so, to the simple and calm, but in multiple associations with words of place on the page. These words, having migration of the land—his decided words, in an unbroken