

Review of Exhibitions

NEW YORK

Tom Butter at Grace Borgenicht

Modern sculpture is roughly divisible into open, horizontal, linear/planar constructions and closed, vertical, solid-seeming monoliths. Most constructions are abstract; most monoliths are figurative or biomorphic in character. Tom Butter's sculpture straddles this opposition: his constructivism limns a nature rampant. His pieces are at core linear, but his lines have stretched and muscled themselves up into volumetric, vertical skins—evoking cylinders, obelisks, skyscrapers, stuttering lightning bolts—five to ten feet high. His lines, and so his sculptures, are imbued with expansion and growth; although his constructions are traditionally composed and seemingly complete, they suggest continuation or extension. They have gained the pulse we often sense in monoliths.

Butter cuts, suspends, guys and staples pieces of fiberglass cloth together to make his skinny volumes, which he then freezes with catalyzed polyester resin colored with dyes. His approach permits him almost to ignore gravity while working: the bottom of an element doesn't have to support the top physically until the resin has hardened, at which time its weight is no problem. Butter generally assembles his sculptures from these pre-made parts, though he will sometimes shape cloth around a rigid fiberglass element that he has made earlier—the work *N.B.* for example. Within a single sculpture, similar shapes are similarly colored.

Butter is probably attracted to the resin/cloth combination for the reasons other sculptors have been: fiberglass is relatively simple to master, requires little equipment to work, can produce objects both light and extremely strong, is responsive to touch, can be ambiguously translucent, and seems to possess a surface simultaneously wet and dry. For Butter it is also a material which can be worked quickly and gesturally—in which his loose personal geometry doesn't look sloppy.

Quickness—actual and apparent—is central to Butter's sculpture. Since he can readily make and rapidly deploy almost any vol-

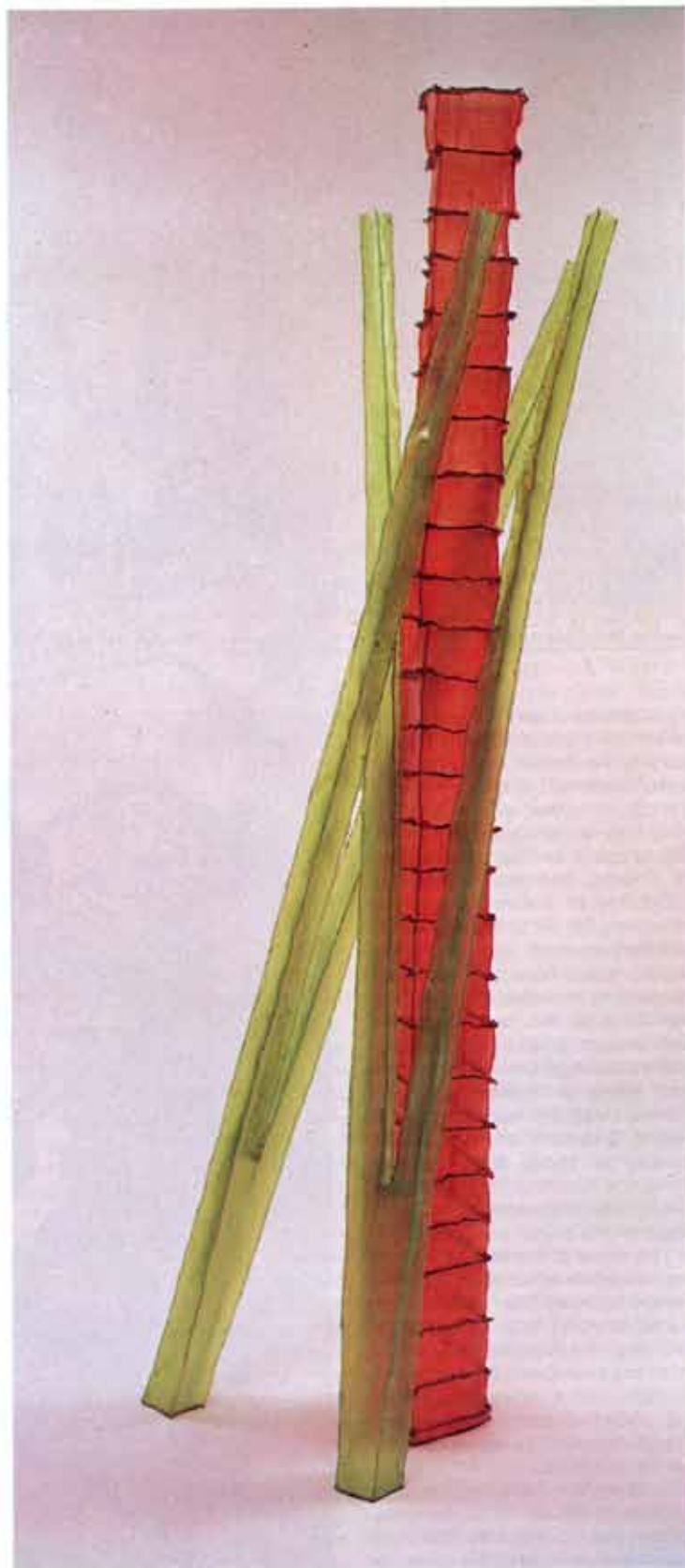
ume he conceives, he recovers some of the liveliness that was central to Chamberlain's and Sugarman's great sculptures of the early '60s. Although the springiness, even tumidity of his forms is suggestive of growing things, it is the relationships in which he places his basically abstract parts that prompt and sustain a biological reading. With a couple of exceptions, the sculptures play a twisting, upward movement off a still, vertical core—actual or implied—like a vine twining around a tree, though in the sculpture the elements are structurally interdependent. Such a movement brings with it a suggestion of time: the pieces are ongoing, not fixed. In *W.H.* a swollen, red, ten-sided column, its greatest girth near our eye-level, rises up from a tight circle of dark, collapsed arcs, like a shucked ear of corn surrounded by husks. Though large, its translucency keeps the piece light; it finesses the big, bigger, biggest quality of monoliths.

Butter's shapes aren't unique—Noguchi's akari lamps, Eva Hesse's, John Duff's, and Barbara Zucker's sculptures are acknowledged sources—but his active handling of space is fresh. He plays the perceived hollowness of his elements off against the open enclosure of their arrangements to suggest separate but simultaneous presents. In *S.L.* and *C.B.* (his titles are people's initials) he partially revives the stunning spatial richness and ambiguity that Constructivist-derived sculpture once had. —Wade Saunders

Marjorie Strider at P.M. & Stein and The Sculpture Center

Strider's show at The Sculpture Center featured works from 1970 through '80—her greatest hits, as it were. The pieces in the exhibition—curated by C.W. Post's Judith K. Van Wagner—brought back fond memories. Who can forget Strider's fragments of Greek vases from the early '70s, showing virile men in dubious poses, cracking apart as they emit blobs of Day-Glo colored gloop? Or her 1973 *Plaster Bag II*, with more styrofoam gloop—this time in pink—overflowing its opening?

Gloop, gloop, gloop—jamming venetian blinds, erupting out of giant Goodman's Soup envelopes, defeating brooms as they



Tom Butter: "S.L.," 1982, fiberglass and resin, 84 inches high; at Grace Borgenicht.