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THE GALLERIES

LA CIENEGA AREA

Veteran California sculptor Robert Cremean shows eight new works depicting nude figures in wood, painted white. They are smaller than usual and each is partially attached to a rectilinear stand and a flat backdrop so, while figures are nine-tenths in the round, they might be considered as extremely high relief particularly since some anatomical parts are rendered as drawing on backgrounds.

Cremean carves figures so that body parts are reduced to stylized geometric volumes, but he never carries this as far as a cubist or constructivist sculptor might. He remains, in fact, like a Renaissance artist moved into the present in a time machine, aware of modern methods and psychology but never quite employing them with vernacular ease.

A male torso called "Dance," for example, begins to take on the erotic stylization of somebody like Richard Lindner, but it never quite gets kinky, retaining the elegance and detachment of early dissection studies. But just when you are about to decide that dignity numbers among the qualities of this art, it comes up with the figure of a bawling kid on a hobbyhorse that is plain silly. Expressively, this art has never sorted out its own limitations so its mannered, elegant volumes are subject to nervous attacks of childish petulance, sexual innuendo and even political implication. They are in bad taste, not because there is anything wrong with them but because they contradict the essential purity of Cremean's art.

They are like the psychological manifestation of a technical problem in this new work. Painted white, it suggests smooth marble or plaster. Thus, carving marks and splinters we accept in wooden sculpture here look awkward and contradict Cremean's reputation as a great craftsman.

For all its internal sour notes, this art frequently pulls itself together, as in "Jumping." It depicts a levitating male figure, his torso clamped between triangular wedges. Here ambiguities shade from torture to crucifixion and apotheosis, but they are of a thematic piece and put Cremean back in time where he belongs—in the 16th Century. (Mekler Gallery, 651 N. La Cienega Blvd., to April 30.)

—WILLIAM WILSON

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An exhibition of Lynda Benglis' and John Duff's sculpture is an amicable pairing of dissimilar work by two artists from the East Coast. She shows elegantly pleated and knotted forms of metal-plated bronze mesh; he makes tall, angular constructions of painted fiber-



"Copper Shift" by John Duff, left, and "Alioth" by Lynda Benglis in show at Margo Leavin Gallery.

glass. Though their sensibilities differ abruptly and their work switches from fluid to rigid form, the sculpture is linked by its wall support, coppery color and large scale, making a handsome, compatible show.

When Benglis first introduced metallic "knots" that hung on the wall, they were twisted, clothlike forms that sometimes bore a resemblance to tortured dancers. Now her sculpture emulates nothing more anguished than lengths of pleated fabric, and the loss of psychological tension is a gain for formal strength. These copper- and aluminum-plated wall pieces, stretching up to about 7 feet, billow and flow like giant, pleated scarves. Usually knotted in the middle, they fan out at the ends or swirl like seashells. They are probably technical marvels, but that is not the point of the art. The most interesting thing about them is the way they transcend material and achieve a nearly weightless state.

Duff has made a startling shift in his art, moving from metal to fiberglass and from organic to roughly geometric form. In one free-standing column and eight

vertical wedges that jut out perpendicular to walls, he constructs sharp-edged, oddly angled, hollow forms from sheets of fiberglass permeated with paint or bearing imprints of wooden molds. The most successful are translucent works with an ethereal presence created by the shadowy shapes of walls with holes made by open-ended tin cans. Surfaces of his sculpture vary from fibrous off-white to splintered wood and patterned paint. "Truncated Wedge" is effectively painterly as pigment seems part of the form. "Copper Shift" is overly glossy but pulls off a triple transformation of fiberglass into copper into wood. (Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., to April 16.)

—SUZANNE MUCHNIC