

Pagel, David. "Abstract Studies" (Review). *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1994, p. F6.



Abstract Studies: The previously unexhibited suite of 21 charcoal drawings by David Smith (1906-65) at Margo Leavin Gallery offers an encyclopedic glimpse into his well-known oeuvre. Sketched over two months in 1958, with more than half the drawings dating from just two days, these approximately 17-by-11-inch works are the only charcoal drawings Smith is known to have made.

This curious group of abstract studies is intriguing because it is at once casual and comprehensive, uncharacteristically loose and remarkably thorough in its survey of the Modernist sculptor's artistic concerns.

Although they lack the stately composure of his handsome ink washes, their offhanded draftsmanship gives them a tentativeness and vulnerability both awkward and charming—qualities rarely seen in Smith's scrupulous ink drawings and never present in his spray-painted or polished steel sculptures.

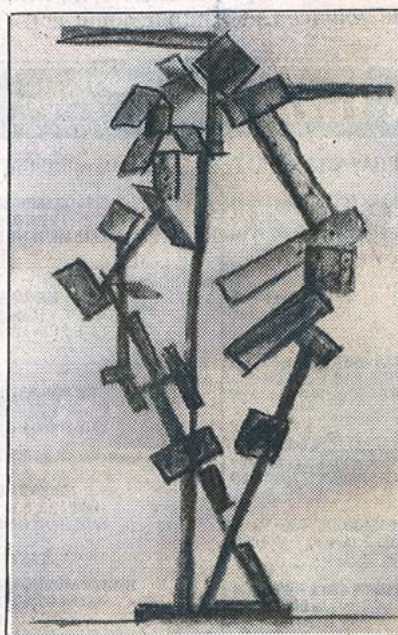
The charcoal sketches fall into three categories. The least captivating most closely resemble the sculptures he made in the 1950s and 1960s, tight clusters of geometric shapes that resist gravity and attempt to lift off their pedestals. More volumetric than his other drawings, these nine images consist of vigorously shaded rectangles and circles.

The next group is nine abstract landscapes. Although the shaky, coloring-book contours of one are filled in with autumnal watercolors, the rest trace fragile, spidery lines.

The three remaining drawings are the oddest and most interesting. Two abstract, supine figures resemble beefy and benign versions of Giacometti's nightmarish sculptures. The third is Smith's weirdest: It appears to be a cartoonish cross between an aardvark and Mickey Mouse.

With a few quirky turns, Smith's charcoal drawings concisely summarize his development as a sculptor, offering a compressed overview in a medium that was as fresh to his hand as it is to his viewers.

■ *Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through June 4. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*



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"Untitled" is one of 21 charcoal drawings by David Smith on display at Margo Leavin Gallery.