

Sculpture In New York

The Structure Within The Form

By Robert C. Morgan

The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein proposed in his *Tractatus* (1922): “Form is the possibility of structure.” This being the case, we might define structure as the parameters or components of language—in this case, a sculptural language—where form is developed or refined as it comes to the surface of recognition, and thus, communicates the artist’s intention.

Today there are many avenues between structure and form. Some artists will use them interchangeably as if they were the same. Others lay out the terms at the outset by which they are going to move ahead in a conceptual way.

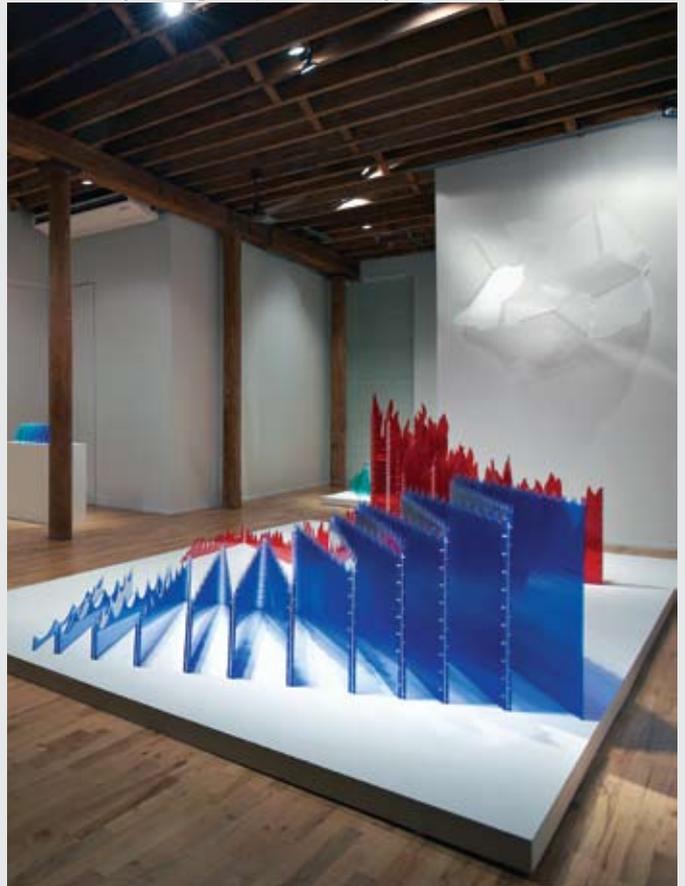
Clearly this was the *modus operandi* for an artist like Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), and related in some way to the work of the Postminimal architectonic sculptor, Richard Serra (b.1939). Within the past two months at the Gagosian Gallery on 24th Street, Serra has presented two enormous networks of weathering steel curves based on computer-derived hyperbolic forms. Having recently dealt with Serra’s monumental drawing exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in the pages of this magazine, it suggests the extent to which his work appears in demand. One may speculate as to the popularity of his sculpture as having something to do with the adventure of being inside these immense steel curves as one walks through them with uncertainty as to where the path is going to lead. In some cases, the viewer does not know one’s exact location within the shape of these complex inversions and conversions even though one may have seen the massive

twisted steel from an exterior point of view.

This suggests a phenomenological adventure between perception and physicality. It also suggests that Serra is beginning a Mannerist phase in his work of the past few years in that nothing markedly significant has appeared since the MoMA retrospective in 2006. In any case, Serra is a sculptor who gives us the terms of sculpture before refining them. In the current work at Gagosian, this occurs less through simplicity than

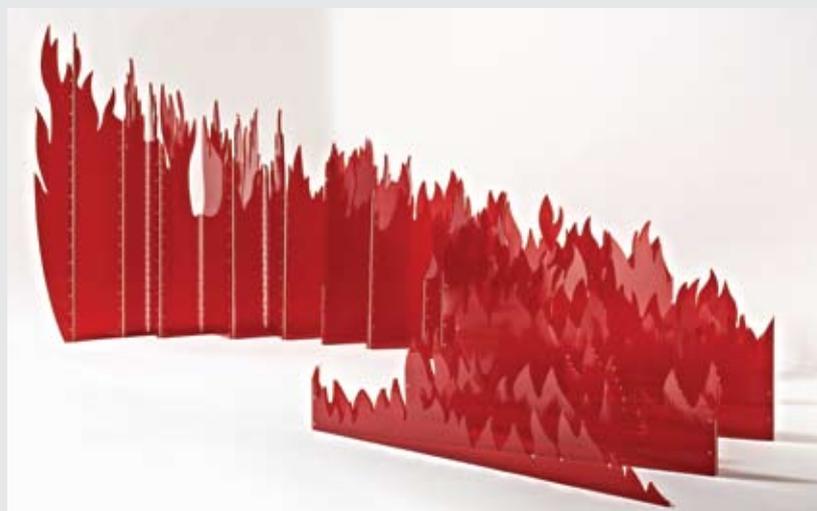
through exaggeration. While there are tests along the way, it would appear that most of the planning happens on the raster before the outset of physical involvement. While there is no argument with the process—assuming this is accurate—the problem is with the expressionist core that abnegates the distance necessary to achieve an ineluctable clarity of refinement, which is currently missing in Serra’s work.

Another more modest exhibition offers an interesting counterpoint to Serra.



An installation view of **Marta Chilindron's** exhibition, *Constructions*, at the Cecilia de Torres Gallery. On the wall: **Marta Chilindron, Cloud**, 2009, acrylic and hinges, 142 x 183 cm. Foreground: **Marta Chilindron, Water** twin wall polycarbonate, Closed: 90 x 128 x 36 cm. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Cecilia de Torres, Ltd.

Argentine-born, New York artist Marta Chilindron also works in a way that places structure at the forefront in her development of forms. In contrast to the kind of formal(ism) promoted by the critic Clement Greenberg in the northern hemisphere of the Americas in the 1950s and 1960s, Chilindron became involved with a Constructivist or Concrete idea of form, possibly initialing from Eastern Europe. The distinction in the two approaches to form is crucial. Whereas the northern hemisphere tended toward a type of aesthetic formalism, the southern hemisphere emphasized structure in terms of a language as a precedent to form. This approach was employed by the Brazilian Neo-Concrete artist Lydia Clark in the 1960s, but by the 1970s was abandoned for another type of “body sculpture.” Some of Clark’s earlier ideas impressed Chilindron who would eventually transform them in the context of her ironic furniture pieces during the 1980s. In the recent work, shown in her exhibition *Constructions*, at the Cecilia de Torres Gallery, Chilindron reveals the culmination of many years of work dealing with translucent and collapsible Polycarbonate planes. Each of these works has a clear sense of language about them as they fold and unfold in various permutations. In contrast to her earlier folded forms, the recent ones focus more on densely saturated color and scale through abstract depictions of *Fire*, *Water*, *Grass*, and *Cloud*. Curiously these earth forms began with a single meteorological form, a suspended *Cloud* (2009), later followed by



Marta Chilindron, *Fire*, 2011, twin wall polycarbonate, closed: 147 x 120 x 43 cm. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Cecilia de Torres, Ltd.

the others in 2010–2011. As for the installation, the vigorous shapes and colors sensualized the gallery space, as they moved from the floor on low theatrical stages upwards to the ceiling, where the *Cloud* was suspended. While the artist’s folding “Constructions” may originate in Constructivism, she has taken them far beyond it. Rather than dropping the signifying elements—in this case, overt simulations of nature—Chilindron’s work incorporates these into her Constructivist idea. In addition, they further suggest abstract patterns and permutations through the process of their collapse into flat forms and eventually through their revival as a virtuoso installation. While one cannot help visualizing these forms as conceptual or language-based, they also function—at least in *Water* (2011)—as defiantly brilliant windows of aquatic light. Yet, of all the works in this exhibition that offer an ethereal antithesis to Serra, Chilindron’s unsuspecting *Cloud* takes the prize. Here is a work where an

even broader, more inclusive development may come in the near future.

Richard Van Buren began his career as a Minimalist back in the mid-1960s when this approach to art-making was becoming dominant in the lofts of SoHo and Tribeca, years before the galleries moved to West Chelsea. In the meantime, Van Buren left New York to live in Maine—the cold country—and in the process his manner of working radically shifted gears. Instead of continuing with a rigid geometric style of modular units on the floor, he began thinking more about crafting his forms in an organic way by giving more attention to the accidental maneuvers of the hand in the process of maneuvering his materials. I am thinking of a work mounted on the wall at the Gary Snyder Gallery in West Chelsea called *Botticelli’s Revenge* (2011). While the title was enough to grab me by the heels, the work itself goes for the juggler. *Magnifico!* The

lavender crescendo weaves its ganglia across the wall as if pulling two nerve-endings apart at either end. It gave me nothing less than a hallucinogenic riff. Like listening to Coltrane’s *Ascension*, Botticelli does, in fact, take revenge. Neo-Rococo—I would say! This is the farthest cry from Minimalism one could possibly expect.

A daintier, yet more eloquent morsel, a manacle of humped tentacle can be cited in *Anabelle’s Kiss* (2010). This is pure poetry spoken like Byron. This is also a wall piece. Like *Botticelli’s Revenge*, Van Buren’s materials are consistent—Thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and seashells. The combination suggests a cracking marinescape, a romantic stasis, a hiss of *élan* blowing through the ears, eyes, and nostrils. *Gum Sum* (2011) is a floor piece, a sticky one at that. The twisted turquoise appendages move in all directions, in and out. There is a fragrance in this piece—not a literal one, but a waft of something sweet, yet oddly vengeful at the same time, more



Richard Van Buren, *Botticelli’s Revenge*, 2011, thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and shells, 72 x 168 x 60 inches. Signed and dated. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Gary Snyder Gallery.



Above right: Richard Van Buren, *Gum Sum*, 2011, thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and shells, 35 ½ x 41 x 44 inches. Signed and dated. **Above left:** Richard Van Buren, *Anabelle's Kiss*, 2010, thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and shells, 42 x 32 x 23 inches. Signed and dated. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Gary Snyder Gallery.

secular than Botticelli, more urbane: the beauty of deceit, the denial of encroachment. But Van Buren has ultimately shown the ability of the true sculptor to bridge the gap, to discard the iron doors of minimal art and gradually move into the ecstatic light of pathos, joy, and the carnal consecration of maturity. This is not a feat that many artists in the era of digital commerce can perform. Van Buren's achievement is not unlike that of the painter Philip Guston. Something unexpected is ringing against temerity and in favor of truth.

An exhibition titled *Nylon* of works by four Koreans—two from New York, and two from London—curated by Inhee Iris Moon, appeared at the facility of the Korean Cultural Services, which is one of the most celebrated institutions for viewing emerging Korean art in New York. I was interested in seeing works by younger artists living outside of Korea in comparison with recent art that has emerged from Seoul over the past two or three years where an overwhelming emphasis on technique (or lack thereof) and repetition of images and ideas done elsewhere has largely predominated. The four artists included in *Nylon* (literally an acronym for New York – London) were: Je Baak who works with DVDs that relate to contemporary imagery and

politics based on his understanding of Zen; Meekyoung Shin who approaches sculpture from an academic perspective, often employing carved soap (differently than Janine Antoni), and thereby questions “the authority and originality of old artifacts”; Buhm Hong who uses DVD projections against welded pipe armatures, reminiscent

of Moholy-Nagy's *Space/Time Modulator* (1922–1930), in order to reveal the poetics or construction of illusion; and finally Jean Shin who collects *objet trouves* such as old umbrellas in *Penumbra* (2003)—a kind of palindrome—and command keycaps from discarded computers that spell out endless sentences in a *tour-de-force*,

titled *Key Promises* (2006/2007). In each case, these artists are working between media and in the realm or influence of media. The works generally lack a sense of gravity and real direction other than to illustrate ideas that exist outside the work, which leads me to believe that some have misunderstood the term “conceptual art.” This misunderstanding has become fiercely predominant in global biennials in recent years, thereby suggesting that the desire to conform to the network is far greater than striving for originality through some unforeseen visionary language. I am still looking for this language as I am still trying to discover something I believe is real. Another question is whether these works have anything to do with structure in art other than their three-dimensionality or if they are simply occupying time and space. To fulfill time and space is different than occupying it, which is the primary challenge these artists have in front of them. The show was engaging to a point, but lacked the ability to sustain meaning over an extended period, even in the course of meditation. Δ



Buhm Hong, Hide and Seek #1 (above, detail) and **Hide and Seek #2** (top), 2011, mixed media with digital projection.

Sculpture in New York, a column by international critic Robert C. Morgan, appears in the pages of World Sculpture News on an occasional basis. Each column presents a theme in relation to a series of exhibitions by three or four sculptors showing in New York City.