

# Tragic Carpet Ride

## Barbara Gallucci's Adventures in Minimalism

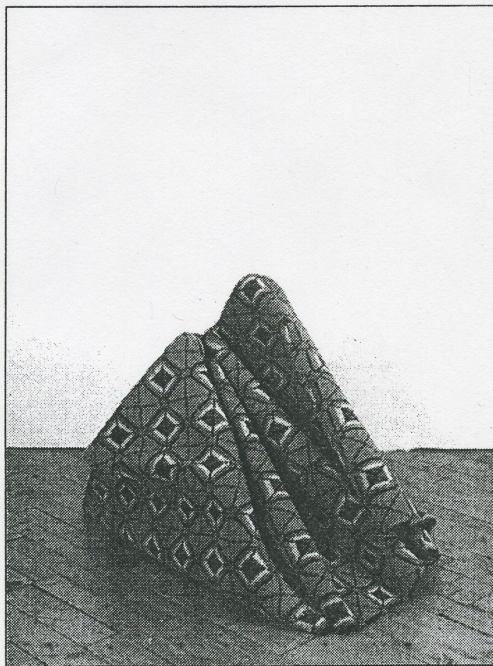
■ BARBARA GALLUCCI. TRI GALLERY, 6365 YUCCA ST., HOLLYWOOD. (213) 469-6686.  
WED.-SAT. 11 A.M.-6 P.M. THROUGH JULY 22.

By David A. Greene

New York artist Barbara Gallucci is a maker of what I've started calling, for lack of a better term, "feminist minimalist" art. Such art mocks (or "critiques") minimalism by mimicking its clichés — things like purity of form and color, and muscular scale — using soft or stereotypically feminine materials, versus standard masculine things like steel or glass. Political statements or affirmations are often injected into the formal mix. (Why such art, which picks on a style both long out of vogue and that had its own detractors back in the 1960s, is so popular today is a convoluted story — one involving the whole sorry state of contemporary art scholarship.)

Rather than the more mundane route of making monochromes out of lipstick or eye shadow, however, Gallucci takes on minimalism by turning icky 1970s home design into funky abstract sculpture: Her mediums are domestic and institutional textiles, like wood-grain Formica and orange shag carpet. In her three floor sculptures (all 1995), Gallucci bonded the Formica to planks of real wood, jigsawing the wholes into curvy geometric shapes that are then bisected (or, in the case of *Family Man*, trisected) and hinged together. Tacked to these pseudo-tabletops are skirts made of geometrically patterned motel carpet, which has a stiffness that allows it to protrude conically when the conglomerations are tipped on their sides.

Gallucci's sculptures are engaging in their well-crafted banality because they dare you to figure out what they are — a trick accomplished, I think, because they don't even know. With their polished surfaces, spacey shapes, and exquisitely ugly patterns, they resemble the kinds of cool, hand-made retro furniture you see in West Hollywood showrooms; but the self-consciously critical posture of their scattershot arrangement, titles, and PR hype point toward the more shoddy feminist-minimalist aesthetic. Meanwhile, the carefully studied ways in which Gallucci has installed her hinges, allowing the carpet strips to fold in stiffly sinuous waves, uncritically recall the diligent materiality of old-style modernist and minimalist art.



Terrible Two

On yet another, simpler plane, Gallucci also really digs ugly carpet. Her rust-colored prints of tin ceilings (also included in this show), and her earlier, less mediated use of linoleum and wallpaper tip us off to the extent of her unconventional affections.

Gallucci's art appears to be trying to reconcile an interest in its own design with rigid beliefs about what art should do: These days, M.F.A. students are taught that art is supposed to perform an editorial function, not a decorative one. But I've yet to encounter an aging minimalist who feels stung by youngsters (both male and female) critiquing his milieu, nor have I met anyone who has been demonstrably empowered by such purportedly therapeutic art. Artists ignore at their peril the time-tested truism that in America, at least, political art has no lasting effect on the machinations of the real world — or even the art world. By relying on things like meaningful materials and formal references to perform their critiques, artists like the feminist minimalists unwittingly end up just making more of the obsolete art they seek to criticize.

For Gallucci, being caught in the middle doesn't seem like such a bad place to be — for now. While some artists in her position ultimately drop fine art altogether, seeking their callings in the many worlds of design, a few, like L.A.'s Jim Isermann, stick with it, learning to explore their unique passions by making art that is new and real. Isermann indulges his own deep fascination with the "bad" textile design of the 1960s and 1970s by seeing it more interestingly as an optimistic try at bringing the avant-garde to the people — and by continuing that tradition. Gallucci seems to share Isermann's spark; her art can go either way.