
American Abstraction Now

Gregory Amenoff
Tom Butter

Rosemarie Castoro
Sam Gilliam

Gail von der Lipp
Ellen Phelan

Martin Puryear

Mia Westerlund Roosen
Livio Saganic

Joan Snyder



The Institute of Contemporary Art of the Virginia Museum

presents

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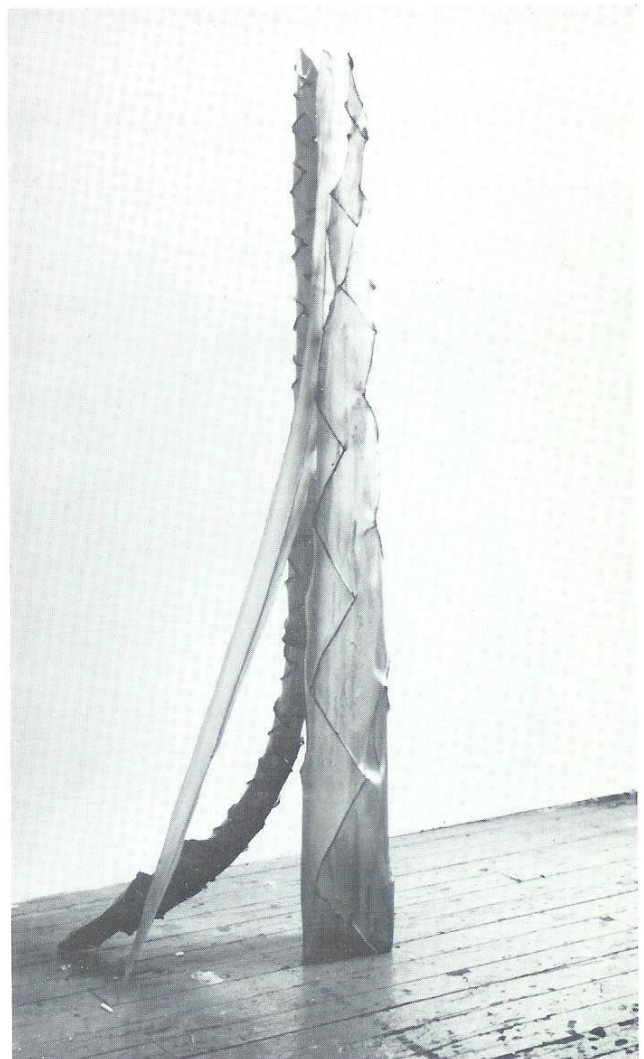
An exhibition of recent painting and sculpture

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Foreword

If nothing else, art historical progression represents action/reaction: a Wolfflinian¹ battle between the classic and the romantic sensibility, between analytical objectivism and emotional subjectivism. These are constant polarities in art history. Certainly the 1970s and early 1980s have been an instructive example of this theory, a telling period of transition and experimentation for artists disenchanted with programmatic, impersonal art. Content, even emotional content, has become acceptable once again. The reductive paucity of Minimalist art—its muteness—is frequently cited in critical writing as a cause for the return to a more personal stance. The artist's presence, often gestural, is apparent once again, and with his presence has returned magic and mystery, the pleasure of applying the medium to its support. The artist's responsibility has been reinvested in the act of painting and sculpture, so that broad content as opposed to execution by some ethical principle motivates the work.

The last twelve years has produced an interesting but swiftly changing art scene characterized by a series of new interests, there being no particularly strong focus on any one idea: narration, figuration, patterning and decoration, realism, New Image work, abstraction. In all those areas, artists seem to be delving into recent or ancient art history for renewed inspiration, but without the intent to plagiarize. The artistic climate of the past twenty-five years has changed significantly, as well, away from "mainstream" dependence on stylistic innovation and emphasis on works having a radical look. Turning their backs on the impersonal modernist aesthetic, in which neither artist nor audience were expected to respond to an art work beyond its purely physical presence, some young artists have returned to the abstract expressionists of the 1950s for their ideas and have forged a fresh pictorial vision for the 1980s. Often, that vision is tinged with the influences of more contemporary movements. Our exhibition deals with those young abstract artists, both painters and sculptors. Their work shows new support for the painterly tradition and ranges from abstract expressionism to gestural abstraction. The end result is that the



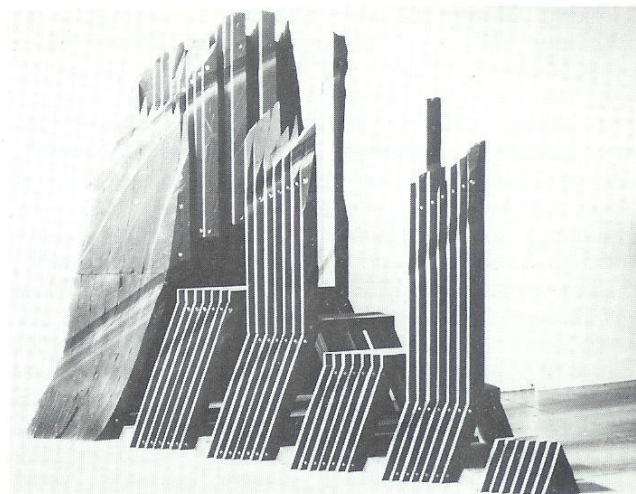
Tom Butter, X.Y. (checklist no. 3)



Mia Westerlund Roosen, *Ovoid Bulk* (checklist no. 14)

The primary impact of Mia Westerlund Roosen's work is its physical mass, whether the scale is large or small. Surface features—incisions and ribbing, dull and shiny—appear incidental to its greater involvement with process and volume and seem at variance with their otherwise minimal aesthetic. Her work, too, produces a contemplative state of mind, particularly the monolithic pieces, while they project a powerful physicality. The pieces are inexorably connected to the ground, both in their forms, which are largely organic, and by the sheer density of material—concrete covered with lead. The shapes are subconscious reminders of portions of the human anatomy, of ritual objects such as Hindu lingas, and of primieval forms, such as those found in natural history museums.⁵

Trained as a printmaker, Livio Saganic turned to rocks, slate, and broken masonite or plywood because of his interest in random, jagged surfaces in relief or intaglio. He views his current works as abstracted landscapes—as islands or stratified geological areas. He prefers slate because it is an “anonymous material with no reference to art materials,” yet it retains a definite landscape reference. Using the accidental fissures and breaks that slate produces when broken, he analyzes the accidents and then derives a sense of order from the random natural structure. The final form of his work embodies permanence and stability, but his method might be described as gestural and accidental.



Livio Saganic, *TE - TD #8* (checklist no. 16)



Gregory Amenoff, *The Grievous Angel* (checklist no. 1)

Within a tightly imposed structure of superimposed planes and dense, labored surfaces, Gregory Amenoff achieves a high degree of expressiveness and movement. Resonant color and writhing, jagged forms create a steamy tropical feeling in works that connect with 1940s surrealists Dove, Kirchner, and Gorky, and with the German Expressionists. Traditional formal problems activate the canvas: flatness/spatial illusion, line/color, figure/ground. The challenge of his work lies in its intense spatial complexity and its expressive pictorial tension.