

# ARTFORUM

## MARCH 1971

### ROBERT DURAN

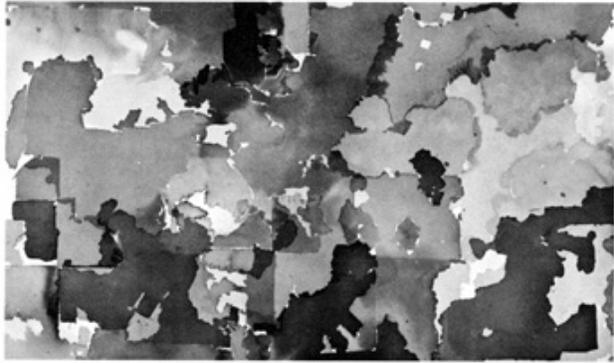
By Robert Pincus-Witten

Recently, I attempted to create a rationale for the seeming happenstance placements of Richard Van Buren's eccentrically shaped plastic reliefs in terms of similar shapes found at the same time in BOB DURAN's painting of 1968–1969. The beauty of Duran's present exhibition makes it clear that we must now clarify his development in terms of his own painting. The first mature works of which one became aware dealt with a means of structuring a surface attracted to erratic shapes, but which at the same time sought artistic confirmation in the retention of certain serial or Minimalist ploys. Duran's painting of 1968 attempted to reinforce a grid organization through the location of thinly painted shapes at the edges of unpainted canvas squares. This established the illusion of the plane while permitting a comparatively free small-shape distribution to evenly spread itself all over the large canvas. Through 1968 and 1969 the shape lost its para-illusionist function in relation to the grid and gained its own expressive autonomy. The shape vocabulary tended to a kind of clipped ornamental figure not dissimilar to the patterns one finds in warp-printed textiles of Uzbekistan. The figure-ground duality inherent in such a compositional method grew to be discounted, so that by the end of 1969 Duran established the color of the ground by approximating the general drift of the ambiguous colors of the thinly painted figures. In the recent works we see a recidivism, the re-emergence of both the abandoned grid and a loosely illusionist figure-ground relationship. At times both are present in a single work. The color remains high key and laid down in a drawn-out acrylic of a generally roseate cast. The application appears more deftly sporadic and tremulous. I may be suggesting the possibility that Duran has come to the end of the orientation in which he set about to work some three or four years ago. Perhaps unsure of how to evolve in terms of substance rather than where to go in terms of style, Duran, in restating certain formal problems, appears to be husbanding energies and waiting.

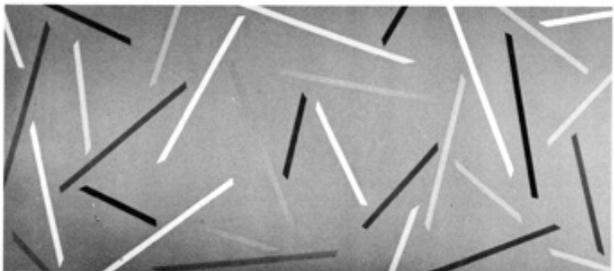
# NEW YORK



Arthur G. Dove, *The Critic*, collage, 19 x 12 1/2", 1925. Dintenfuss Gallery.



Robert Duran, untitled, liquitex, 5'8 1/2" x 10', 1970. Bykert Gallery.



Alan Cote, untitled, acrylic, 18 x 8', 1970. Reese Palley Gallery.

ARTHUR DOVE, Dintenfuss Gallery; BOB DURAN, Bykert Gallery; ALAN COTE, Reese Palley Gallery; PETER REGINATO, Tibor de Nagy Gallery; ELLIOTT LLOYD, Sachs Gallery; JOHN GUNDELINGER, John B. Myers Gallery; PETER PASSUNTINO, Sonraed Gallery;

The ARTHUR G. DOVE collages, which are largely concentrated in the 1920s, allude to curious and important historical problems. As a painter, Dove is associated with the tradition of landscape, which seeks to find signs or other visual equivalents for the landscape experience. In this desire Dove can be associated, say, with early Georgia O'Keeffe and that first phase of William Zorach's career which he spent as a painter. In short, their landscape painting derives from aspects of Futurist theory. Remember, it was the Futurist who sought "unique forms" and "dynamic hieroglyphs."

But, Dove's collages put forth another aspect of American modernism, that strain of Dadaism which was fostered in the circle of Stieglitz, with whom Dove exhibited to the closing of An American Place, as Stieglitz's gallery of the 1930s was called. (Although Stieglitz's antipathy to Dadaist art and Dadaist enthusiasts—preeminently the Arensbergs—is well recorded, he was personally attracted to Dadaist artists as people, most notably Picabia.) There is still an occasional painterly collage with distinct references of Kandinsky such as we find in the George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* collages of 1927, in the first of which clock-springs are contrasted against nervous blue brush swirlings. But it is the specific Dada portraits which are more to the point of my argument which is that for Dove collage is before all else a Dadaistic technique rather than a Cubist or Futurist one. Dove's *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* of 1925 contrasts the order and disorder of metal, clock-spring, steel wool and photographic plate above which the eye of Stieglitz is signified through the inclusion of a camera lens. Certainly Picabia's incarnation of Stieglitz as a camera in his 1915 collage *Ici, C'est Ici Stieglitz* is the equivalent right down to the *fraktur* "Ideal" at the lens aperture. In a collage called *The Critic*, perhaps a portrait of the reactionary critic Royal

Cortisoz, an empty-headed, red-hatted figure whose body is a cut-out review as flat as his prose in support of Beaux Arts academicians, roller-skates by while sucking up tidbits with his Energex vacuum cleaner. This kind of sardonic portrait, forerunner of Jasper Johns' *The Critic Sees*, has a high increment of the irony we associate with German Dadaism such as in George Grosz's collages. Even Joseph Cornell is first in Dove's collage, *Starry Heavens*, of 1924, in which a gold-spattered circle of blue with the Big and Little Dipper carefully painted in calls to mind the many Cornell boxes which incorporate the theme of constellation and starry sky.

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ground relationship. At times both are present in a single work. The color remains high key and laid down in a drawn-out acrylic of a generally roseate cast. The application appears more deftly sporadic and tremulous. I may be suggesting the possibility that Duran has come to the end of the orientation in which he set about to work some three or four years ago. Perhaps unsure of how to evolve in terms of substance rather than *where* to go in terms of style, Duran, in restating certain formal problems, appears to be husbanding energies and waiting.

Were the large paintings of ALAN COTE first shown in 1966 or 1967, I suspect that this young artist would have been received as a figure of considerable rank. As it is, those aspects of his work which so clearly derive from middle Stella, early Poons and early Avedisian, while not exactly discrediting the present paintings, nonetheless locate them in a stream of New York taste which while still lovely, has become, at least to me, a displaced center. But the pictures are tremendously likeable. The grounds are firmly and evenly colored. Dispersed across them are sharp rod-like shapes, snip-ended, which are carefully contrasted against the ground. Because of the color contrasts, the ground functions ambiguously in space by instants, although, generally speaking, abstract illusionism is not the prim-

ary aim of these works.

The free dispersal of these shapes has a peculiar history, not only related to Bill Bollinger's piercing anodized aluminum channels of 1966-67 but also to Ronnie Landfield's rod-filled compositions of 1967. Moreover, a longer tradition is alluded to which incorporates both Dadaism and Cubism. Picabia's *La femme aux allumettes* of 1920 and Arthur G. Dove's *Goin' Fishin'* of 1925 ought to be remembered for the inception of compositions based on such a recalcitrant figure. But ultimately Cote's works are a chromatic restatement, on a monumental scale, of the maze-like functioning of edge found in the Hermetic Cubist painting of Picasso and Braque in the period of 1910-12, an idiom transferred into the "plus and minus" compositions of Mondrian of 1913. In all of these works the edges provide a kind of visual obstacle, hurdles to pass around or to jump over. In short, like the great works I have cited, Cote's large pictures transform image into an intense and conscious action of sight. As actions of sight, the Cotes—perhaps burdened with a long heritage not immediately guessed at—nonetheless are remarkable, most probably for the bigness of their scale and the declarative character of their color.

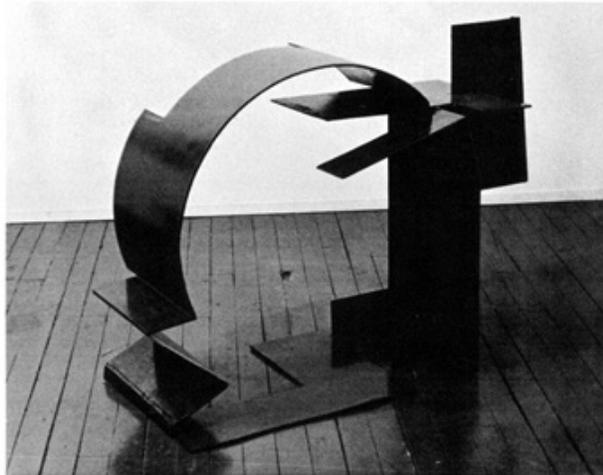
The exhibition of PETER REGINATO's welded steel sculptures pre-

sents problems concerning the relationship of a young artist to the Constructivist/Cubist idiom. Widely rejected on the basis of its familiarity there are, however, certain Constructivist/Cubist inferences, say, within the affirmative character of Richard Serra's axiomatic structures. By contrast, the strain which Reginato emphasizes deals in the plane, shape and scale comparisons inherent in the tradition of Cubist sensibility. In this respect Reginato's work may be compared to Michael Steiner's recent steel structures although he studiously avoids the low-lying, collage-derived sensibility of the latter. In the degree that Reginato is drawn by organizations which rise up, if somewhat squatly, the immediate figure for comparison is, evidently, David Smith. Reginato's chief problem, it seems to me, is not in having adopted the Cubist/Constructivist vernacular, but in the formulation of this vernacular in a middle scale range. Insufficiently small for us to perceive the conjunctiveness of Cubist comparison—the famous, possibly mythical "Cubist grid"—and insufficiently large for us to relate in a physiological way to scale, the Reginatos end up in a middle range which is curiously neutral in its effect at this moment in art history. The scale issue is important because as middle range works they are not able to compel us on an adumbrative level nor do

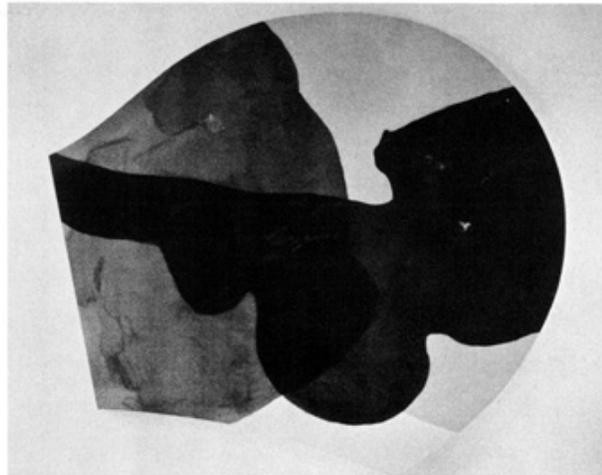
they easily correspond to our ingrained desire for magnitude as content. In short, they remain objects of a certain dimension within a gallery context and as such seem ethically doubtful, devaluating the Cubist/Constructivist vernacular into an ornamental exercise.

Two young artists involved in the evolution of color painting present difficult works because they so largely run against the stream of present sensibility. ELLIOTT LLOYD prefers a downbeat range of color which he organizes in overlapping transparencies. The shapes have the same casualness of "arrival" that the silhouetted configuration of the canvas support does. My resistance to the work is largely based on the organic connotations inherent in the template-like shapes which characterize both the image and the stretcher system. Breast and nipple profiles often are brushily alluded to. In making his decisions Lloyd brings up issues of Surrealist anthropomorphism in the context of color painting. The conjunction is interesting but strained.

JOHN GUNDELFINGER is more complex since his color painting of particularly billious and noxious ranges—on purpose—end up about bosky landscape painting. The technique employs the vicissitudes of lyric abstraction but throws it into the tradition of the loose monotype landscapes of Degas' and Monet's



Peter Reginato, *Flathead*, welded steel, 38 x 48 x 24", 1970. Tibor de Nagy Gallery.



Elliott Lloyd, *Wind-Up*, acrylic, 83½ x 94", 1970. Sachs Gallery.