

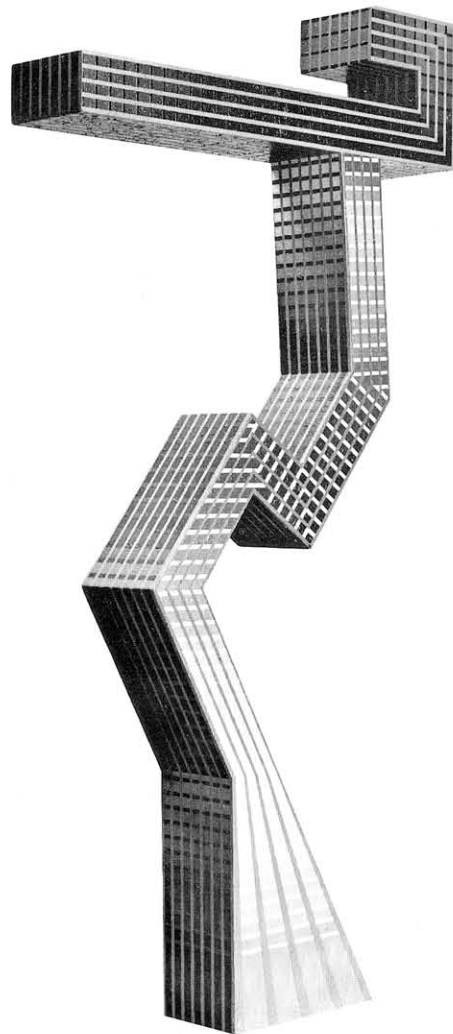
With an attitude that simultaneously acknowledges modernism's legacy and parodies its mannerisms, Martin Myers addresses modernist issues in both painting and sculpture, two media he has combined in his work since the early 1970s. The scope of modernism under his consideration includes architecture as well, which has been the obvious "subject" of his work since the paintings on canvas he did while still in school. The foundational image in this ongoing body of work has its source—more apparently so in the early pieces, less so in the recent—in the skyscraper, the quintessential twentieth century monument. Using it partly in homage, partly in parody, he tangentially recognizes the parallels between the growing postmodernist movement in architecture and what now can be called post-postmodernism in the visual arts.

In the recent work more than in the earlier, the architectural theme serves as subtheme to a critique of selected isms of painting and sculpture over the past two decades. Like Richard Artschwager and Roy Lichtenstein, with whom Myers shares more than he does with any west coast artist, he chooses an image with functional associations and, after extracting from it certain essential features, arrives at a mutation that resonates with a tension between the final form and its initial source. Reduced to near human scale but still exceeding human height, the compressed architectural image parodies monumental minimalist sculpture of the 1960s; the surfaces painted with grids that originally signified architectural details satirically refer to the grid structures popular in painting of the 1960s and '70s.

The initial directness and levity of Myers' works also belie a dense layering of opposing characteristics and effects. Vestiges of architectural monumentality coexist with intentional, sometimes whimsical distortions of form and surface that threaten to turn the sculptures into cartoons. The rational geometric system that organizes the surface often becomes arbitrary and irrational, as when the spacing or direction of the grid abruptly departs from its close relationship to the underlying form. However flat and precise the grid structure may seem at a distance, the surfaces of the pieces have a lumpy texture caused by subtle variations in the application of acrylic paint. As a final opposition, the phallic forms are titled with female names.

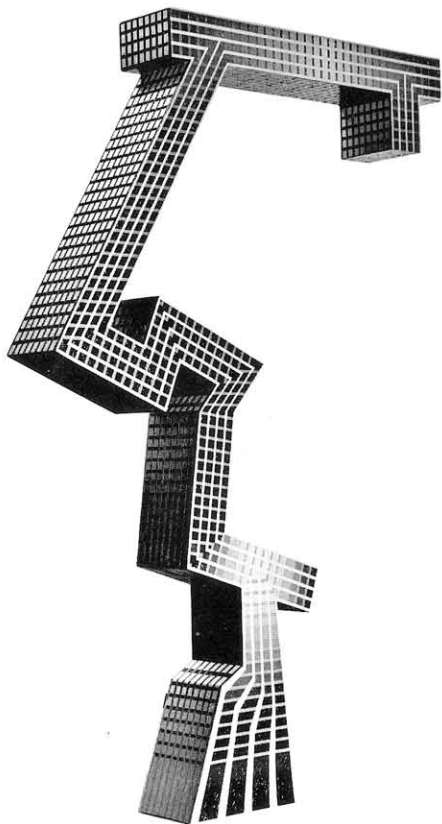
Of all the formal relationships in Myers' work, the overriding one is the combination of, or contradiction between, painted surface and sculptural form—an aspect that has increased in confidence and resolution as the work has evolved. The earlier pieces were closer to the skyscraper image in format, which was vertical and only later diagonal, and in color, which was restricted to an urban palette based on variations of concrete gray. As Myers developed the work over the past several years, the forms became less literal and more expressive, and the painting, less illustrational and more aggressive, even garish. Reaching its greatest intensity in the current work, the interaction of surface and form prevents the pieces from being seen as four-sided paintings, which was, in retrospect, a weaker element of the early works.

As earthbound as the forms may seem and as weighty as the Novoply (premium particle board) construction actually is, the painted surface appears to be stretched over the structures as if it were only the thinnest of skins. The light that enables us to see the work seems to radiate as much from within as to come from without. In the illusions that result, planes of modulated color implied beneath the contrasting grids suffuse beyond the surface, activating what are essentially



Martin Myers
Glenda
1982
acrylic on Novoply
96 1/2" x 47 1/4" x 10 1/8"

Martin Myers
Karen 1981
acrylic on Novoply
95³/₄" x 48" x 9¹/₂"



static objects. Each face of a sculpture receives a different treatment of color, and the optical vibrancy, either from side to side or within a single panel, is sometimes so dissonantly vivid as to discourage prolonged viewing. These painterly illusions, as well as such devices as the occasional use of a "base," wherein the vertical elements of the grid read as lines of perspective, cause the forms to look less rigid than they are. In defiance of their flatness, sections appear to bend or bulge, others to stretch or warp, or to advance or recede. The pieces stand still; it's the perceptions that contort.

As if trying to deny their immobile state, the upper portions of the most recent

Martin Myers
Sara 1982
acrylic on Novoply
97" x 44¹/₂" x 10¹/₈"



works split into angular arms that reach into space. Removed farther from their image source, they double over themselves like cactus after decades in the desert. The irony in these sculptures remains strong, but a louder laugh than before can be heard as Myers exaggerates his modernist parodies while making work that irreverently records its own evolution. (JD)

Judith Dunham in **NEW BAY AREA PAINTING AND SCULPTURE**
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