

SCULPTURE AS PAINTING AS SCULPTURE

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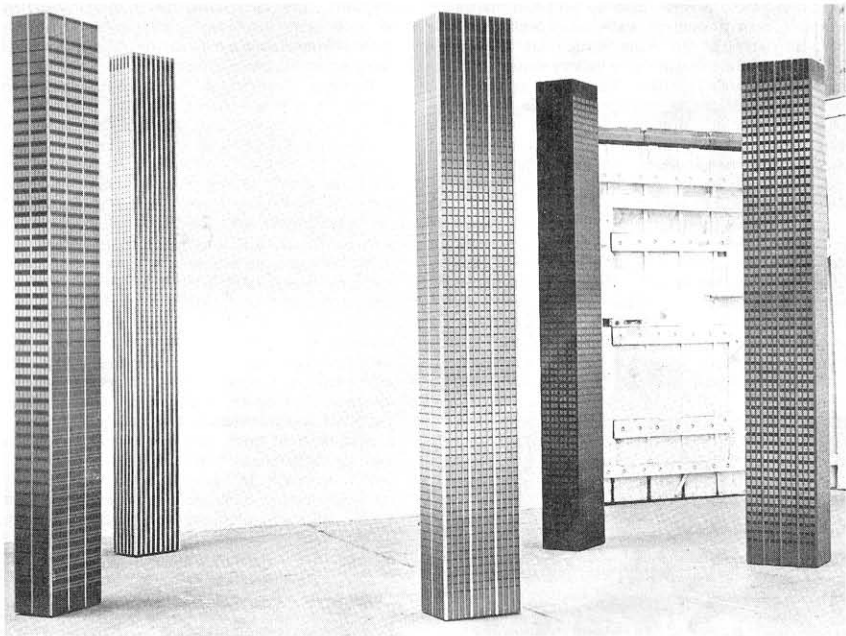
San Francisco

If you sit or lie on the floor of the Hansen Fuller Gallery to experience Martin Myers' pieces, you may feel like a twentieth century Gulliver amid a cluster of highrises erected by Lilliputians. Simply described, his painted sculptures are nine-foot high monoliths covered with gridwork identifiable as vertical and horizontal architectural elements. Scale relationships are obviously important to the pieces. In their presence you are a giant intruder in a land whose inhabitants must be only one or two inches tall. Reversing the perspective, you in turn are dwarfed by the painted towers. These contradictory sensations are startling and even comical, but in the long run don't hide or undermine the additional, perhaps more serious facets of Myers' work. Rather, they heighten the impact and appreciation of form, color and illusion.

By his own admission, Myers isn't especially interested in architecture, and he has no particular associations with the building types he chooses. In contrast to some viewers' observations, the pieces are not intended as social comment, nor as a glorification of the skyscraper. The skyscraper is an image Myers selected for its modernity and above all for the information — form and structure — that it provides as a vehicle for painting. The information he borrows is intentionally held at a minimum. Just enough clues are given to make the pieces recognizable as buildings, but superfluous details are omitted to prevent the works becoming sentimental re-creations of architecture and in order to emphasize the role of the works as paintings.

As you might expect, Myers' pieces can't accurately be called sculptures. Or paintings, for that matter. Perhaps they are either painted sculptures or sculptural painting. Myers once described them as "paintings masquerading as objects," and he does put as much effort into color and illusion as into form and scale. All the pieces, which like hurricanes bear female names, are covered with an all-over grid that may differ from side to side. The paint, a combination of rhoplex and acrylic, is applied fairly thinly to the particle board shapes, leaving a shiny, slightly lumpy texture. If it were possible to slice any of the works along the length of a corner, peel off the surface and mount it flat on the wall, you would have a grid painting — one that is not nearly as three-

As both a variation within the grid and a



MARTIN MYERS: Studio view of work now at the Hansen Fuller Gallery, 1976, rhoplex and acrylic on particle board, 116" h.

interesting or complex in two dimensions as in suggestion of nonexistent surrounding atmosphere; some colors gradually fade and intensify from top to bottom of the sculptures, creating waves of light that shine on the facades. Urban-looking colors envelop some pieces, like the smog-tinged violets, yellows, blues and flesh tones of *Mona* or the grayed hues of *Vera*. The more subdued *Emma* is primarily blues, black and grays. *Anna*, whose light-colored vertical members predominate, at times appears to be only a shell encasing a void. Proportions of these and the other works alter illusionistically according to the divisions of the grid and the placement of color modulations.

Since his previous show, at 80 Langton in

August, 1975, Myers has simplified his work by eliminating the reflections or shadows of imaginary surrounding buildings which frequently appeared on the sides of earlier pieces. *Lena*, the earliest sculpture here, is the only one on an view which carries the silhouetted profile of a thirties-style building. Myers now feels that such an image is an "unnecessary clue" to the works' source. I agree. Although Myers has more ideas to complete in this series, he thinks his next major body of work may be almost totally abstract. Coming from someone this young (born 1951), his pieces are unusual and intelligent, his ideas clearly expressed — which I hope bodes well for his future.[]