

EXHIBITION

Martin Myers: Significant Form

San Francisco / Frank Cebulski

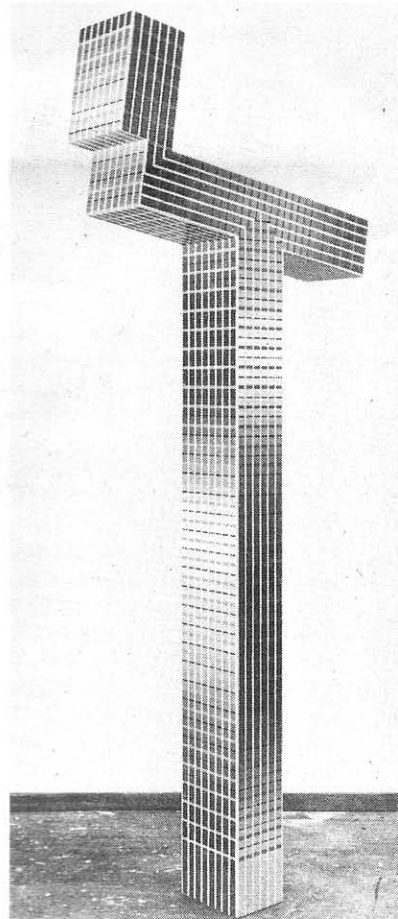
Martin Myers' eleven new sculptures, on view at Modernism, brilliantly carry forward his previously fine amalgam of painterly surfaces and angular forms. The idea of significant form has long been a subject of critical discussion in modern art, from the theories of Clive Bell of the Bloomsbury Group to the astute and attractively consistent esthetics of Suzanne K. Langer. The affective theory of beauty that significant form sustains would eliminate surface and texture from sculpture as needless decoration, and figure and representation from painting as useless reference. At bottom, the theory invites the age-old artificial conflict between content and form. What certain sculptors and painters of every era have always done, however, is to ignore such academic and Platonic distinctions to create works that are objects of admiration precisely because they successfully combine surface representation with appropriate form.

Myers' techniques, which have been previously reviewed in earlier issues of ARTWEEK (February 5, 1977, June 18, 1977 and March 23, 1979), clearly show that he has a strong command of materials and form. The sculptures have a double reference to urban landscapes of skyscrapers and skyline (*Madrid*) and to stylized geometric abstract portraits of women (*Laura*, *Carrie*, *Grace*, *Mana*, *Cheryl*, *Joanne*). On the angular, hollow, boxlike constructions of particleboard and novoply, Myers paints evenly demarcated and lined, vertical and horizontal squares whose brilliant colors

range from dark to light and shift subtly from one to another through intermediate progressive shades with each successive row of squares. The optical effect that the play of light creates upon these grids of colors and network of lines is to make the vertical colored stripes dominant in some perspectives and the horizontal stripes dominant in others. The surface movement among the colors of the squares, as the eye crosses from dark to light and back again, produces the effect of illumination coming from behind, as if the squares were indeed the darkened or lighted windows of buildings in shadow or in sunlight.

All of these freestanding painted sculptures are over eight feet tall and maintain a monumental architectural scale. Some stand in great cubical simplicity, like *Anna* (1977). Some are single, unsupported boxlike forms, like *Cheryl* (1980), *Fortuna* (1980) and *Grace* (1981), surprising in the two-dimensionality of their crooks and flat twists. Others are formed of two or three boxed forms joined together, like *Laura* (1980), *Reni* (1980), *Jennifer* (1979), *Carrie* (1980), *Mana* (1980), *Joanne* (1980) and *Madrid* (1980). The mood and character of each piece are strikingly different. *Cheryl* is startlingly luminescent, with its red horizontal lines and vertical stripes with green. *Mana* actually resembles a "modernist" stylized profile of a woman's head.

The space in and around these sculptures is equally well organized and planned, and is commensurate with the



Martin Myers, "Laura," 1980, acrylic on novoply, 100-1/2" x 39" x 10", at Modernism, San Francisco.

forms and surfaces. Although the predominant thrust of these pieces is vertical, some terminate satisfactorily with abrupt horizontals that arrest the upward movement and/or turn it back down onto another section of the sculpture. Yet the overall effect of these sculptures is not abruptness, incompleteness or brutality, in spite of their angularity, but is elegance, wit and intellect. The shifting color moods, from row of squares to row of squares and from surface to surface, enhance the themes and unify surfaces with forms. □