

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

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FAMILIAR IDEAS IN THREE NEW EXHIBITS

COMMODITY-CULTURE ART RIDES AGAIN

By SUZANNE MUCHNIC,
Times Art Writer

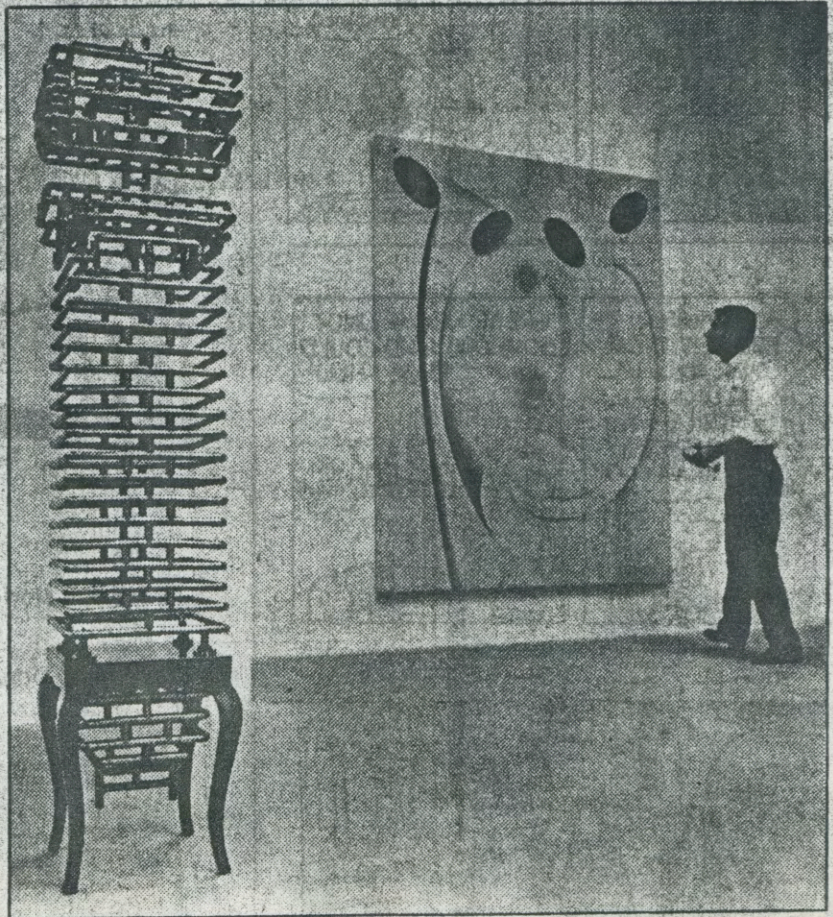
Is this the new thing? These New York reruns of Op, Pop, Warhol and Duchamp? Must be. Why else would concurrent exhibitions of them have overtaken three of our best galleries?

"Paravision," a big, bright group show, has swept into Margo Leavin's Hilldale Avenue gallery (to Aug. 23) with a blaze of color, a shot of audacity and a printed statement so opaque that it must be a parody of artspeak. Never mind. The works shout for themselves in languages that recall the days of Op Art and Pop's infatuation with commercial reproduction.

Unfortunately, about half of them have nothing to say beyond a declaration of stylish boredom. They either put you to sleep from their utter paucity of imagination or, after a noisy entrance, they empty out quicker than you can look at them.

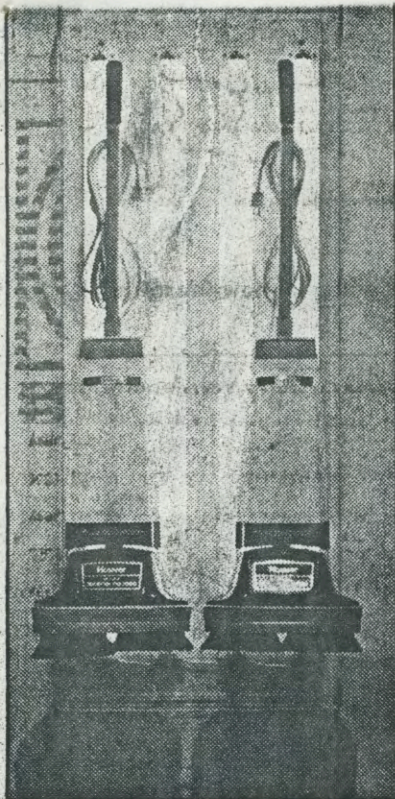
It's hard to justify James Well- ing's black-and-white paint splats. And why is Peter Hopkins painting zingy rows of hot pink dots on chartreuse? Are we so hard-pressed for ideas that we have to revive Op, one of 20th-Century art's most trivial movements?

Among other disappointments, Peter Halley has composed a panel



Joel Otterson's "Artificial Intelligence," left, and Gary Steiner's "Guest Ice," part of "Paravision" exhibit at Leavin Gallery.

ELLEN



LORIN SHEPLER

Jeff Koons' vacuum cleaners at Otis/Parsons exhibition.

of three canvases painted with variations of Day-Glo orange. Not to be outdone, Olivier Mosset presents a solid blue-green canvas that runs on for 21 feet in utter silence. Do we need psychedelic sequels to Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman?

This ambitious presentation, assembled by guest curators Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo, is such a snappy-looking package that it's hard to believe there is so little to it. Sure enough, more interesting material is sprinkled among the "Post-Op" cop-outs. Gary Stephan's evocative abstract painting, "Guest Ice," is so subtle as to seem out of place, but it holds its own in one corner.

Near the entrance, Robert Longo is busy being a tough guy as usual in a piece that effectively juxtaposes an upside-down image of laborers with a pyramidal hood of rusty metal. Joel Otterson offers a witty paean to uselessness by building a tower of copper plumbing on a little wooden table in a sculpture called "Artificial Intelligence."

The world is already overloaded with Duchampian gestures, but when Haim Steinbach stacks up ice chests and bubbling oil lamps on slickly cantilevered shelving he renews the idea by addressing a kitsch aesthetic along with contemporary consumerism.

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Works by some of the artists at Leavin's gallery turn up at Otis/Parsons' Exhibition Center,



Koons' heart-of-commerce "Fisherman Golfer" bar caddy.

where Walter Hopps and Howard Halle have organized "A Brokerage of Desire." The show (to Aug. 30) features six New York artists who criticize the commodity status of culture.

"A Brokerage of Desire" is far more sharply focused than the rambling "Paravision," though it is concerned with some of the same issues—and it leaves you with an equally hollow feeling. More than reruns of Pop's simultaneous celebration and denigration of consumerism, the works at Otis/Parsons are updates that have become bogged down in cynicism.

They arise from such despairing Post-Modern views as: 1) everything has been done; 2) in a world already overloaded with things and images, artists should draw from the existing pool rather than try to create new ones; 3) modern media have not only bombarded us with information but manipulated the way we interpret it, and 4) culture itself has become a commodity.

Thus, we find the following at Otis/Parsons: Alan Belcher making photographs of commercial products, Gretchen Bender juxtaposing photographic images of people with those of machines and geometric structures, and Peter Nagy printing emblems of Duchamp, Malevich, Warhol and appropriationist Sherrie Levine on a cardboard box called "The Objectification of Suicide."

Jeff Koons shows gleaming vacuum cleaners, boxed in plexiglass or mounted on fluorescent light fixtures like haloed icons. Steinbach holds forth with such mun-

of detergent on Formica shelving.

This isn't terrible art, but it's too derivative to be very interesting. Despite its undeniable relevance, it looks rather like a soapbox preacher trying to beat some energy into an overexposed issue.

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An up-to-the-minute look at Koons' work, in a solo show at the Daniel Weinberg Gallery (to Aug. 16), reveals that he has switched from real vacuum cleaners to reproductions of liquor ads and stainless steel facsimiles of Jim Beam bottles and bartenders' gadgets. The result is pure Warhol—or perhaps purified Warhol, expunged of any traditional connection to art-making.

Koons also takes some cues from Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Unlike Andy, Koons

doesn't bother to dress up reproductions with brush strokes or other arty devices. He goes straight to the point of commerce by printing ads in ink on canvas and making stainless steel replicas of the bourbon merchant's antique train sets, in which every car is a bottle. He also copies an ice bucket, a portable bar and a cute little "Fisherman Golfer" bar caddy who wears a shot-glass cap and carries everything from tongs to bottle openers.

These facsimiles "maintain the beauty and integrity of the originals," says Koons in a press release. Step right up, folks. You can be part of the fun, but you'd better hurry. Only three editions were cast of the stainless steel works, two of the liquor ads.

There are several ways to look at this art. You can swallow the artist's line, you can take a theoretical approach and argue about how clever he is to push the concept of exploitation to the limit, or you can point to Koons as a shrewd entrepreneur laughing all the way to the bank as he taps into the solid market of Jim Beam bottle collectors.

Lining up with the conservatives drives me crazy, but the opposite stance is to admit that art has hit rock bottom and gotten stoned on collectibles.

At best, these three shows provide an antidote to the melodramatic excesses of Neo-Expressionism. Unfortunately, the treatment is so callow that it makes the disease seem benign. The thrill of Pop and Op is gone, though no doubt that's less true for those who are too young or didn't pay attention the first time around.



LORI SHEPLER

Haim Steinbach's artworks focus on such mundane objects as pitchers and boxes of detergent on Formica shelving.