

Opinion: Inaugural Show By Arthur Carter



Brett Littman | February 10, 2000

Arthur Carter's new sculptures at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in New York remind me of the book "Godel Escher Bach," by Douglas Hofstadter, which explores the intersections between math, art, and music.

Mr. Carter, who trained as a classical musician, has chosen bronze and steel as a way of personally synthesizing and expressing this complex amalgam of disciplines. With titles like "Largo," "Triad," "Mathematika," and "Musika," Mr. Carter prompts the viewer to make connections between sound, motion, form, and material.

Mr. Carter works in a large format. "Triad," the tallest sculpture in the series, is about 10 feet high and "Suffusion," the smallest, is five feet high.



Kinetic Punch

Scale is integral to these objects as it allows Mr. Carter to trace energy and motion throughout the forms from top to bottom and side to side. For example, in "Morph," a slightly undulating brushed bronze base supports an eight-foot sinewy S-shaped curve that blasts straight up into the air. The curve itself expands and contracts as it reaches its apex, making for an uneasy fulcrum. The fact that the curve is taller than a normal human body gives this sculpture its kinetic and dynamic punch. When we stand next to it there is the lingering fear that we might topple it over or cause it to fall down.

"Musika," another tall sculpture, also engages our body. This X-shaped work, bending in all directions, seems as though it is moving toward us, ready to grasp us in an embrace. The gestures of its bronze limbs resonate like crescendos, giving the viewer a visual charge.

Like Soap Bubbles

"Elliptyk," composed of eight intertwining bronze ovals, is quite playful. It looks like soap bubbles rising into the atmosphere or notes set free from a score. The lighting in gallery allowed the group of ovals to cast a beautiful shadow on the wall reminiscent of mid-century Eames textile designs.

In "The Couple," two large stainless steel and bronze intersecting hollow ovals are precariously balanced against one another.

This sculpture exploits the delicate relationship between density and balance. The end result is an object that seems to defy gravity. As well, the use of two different metals, steel and bronze, forces the viewer to ponder the deeper emotional implications of sculpture beyond just the formal exploration of geometry.

Treated Surfaces

"Largo" is one of the most compelling sculptures in the exhibit and looks a little like a maquette for an unrealized Frank Gehry building. Four connected bronze rectangles unevenly protrude from a steel base. The components seem to be pushing against each other like tectonic plates in the earth's substrata. There is an unresolved sense of force and melancholy in this piece.

Mr. Carter's tour de force, however, is his technique of brushing and treating the metal surfaces of his work. In "Largo," the bronze skin captures and plays with light. In the context of the title, the curlicues of trapped light are like notes that explode off the surface as we move around the object.

His surface treatments create the need for the viewer to change position and move about the room to truly and fully experience the objects as they change moods in different lighting condition. One can only imagine what these sculptures would look like outdoors in natural light.

Brett Littman, an art critic and associate director at UrbanGlass, a non-profit glass arts center in Brooklyn, is a frequent visitor to East Hampton.

Arthur Carter is publisher of The New York Observer, The Lichtfield County Times, and The East Hampton Star.