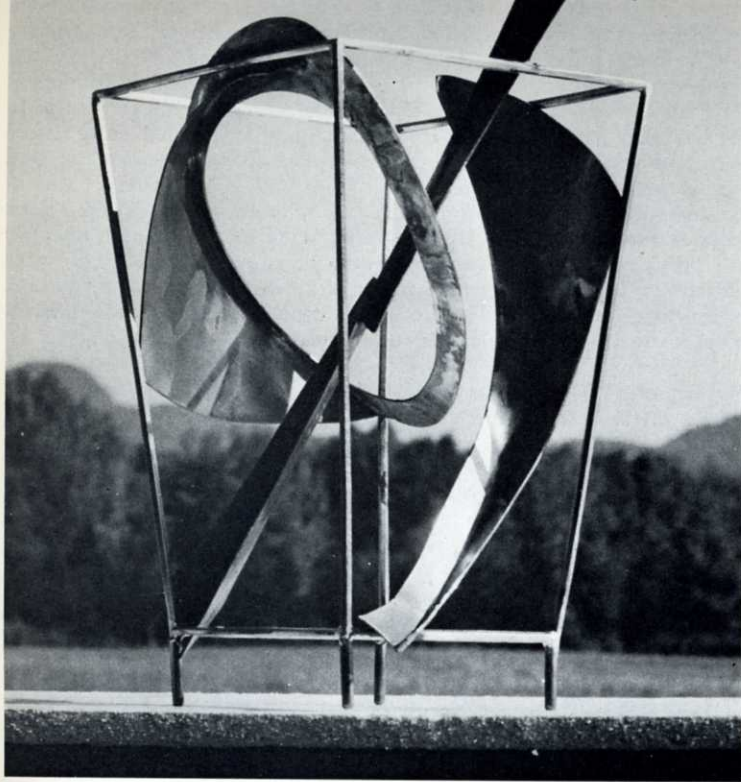


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Ferber. *Oval & Triangles in Cage I*, 1970. Copper, height 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Andre Emmerich Gallery



Ferber. *Newport II*, 1969. Copper, height 39". Andre Emmerich Gallery

best pieces are like giant doll-houses peopled by pieces of stray moulding, balustrades, columns, and less formalized wooden entities; her technique of spraying the entire mélange in gold gilt (or white, in the case of *Wedding Chapel*) serves to bring the possibilities for stagey illusionism forward to an almost picture-plane like surface, at which dimensional point there *are* no possibilities for illusion. Nevelson's best work is more metaphysical than poetic; it satisfies because it insists on exteriorizing poetic interiors, and it is "deep" because it excavates depths even as they continue to exist.

Herbert Ferber, on the other hand, works in three dimensions; there are no backs to his works. Surprisingly (or perhaps typically) this sculptor is less "successful" (in a non-judgmental sense) with his individual pieces than is Nevelson; it isn't easy to cope with all three dimensions, but it is brave. Unfortunately, Ferber's titles (like Nevelson's) would have his

works biting the hand that made them: a name like *Newport* simply doesn't do justice to the elegantly tortuous piece that this work really is. Fortunately the works are true to themselves; one of the delights of good abstract sculpture (and this includes Ferber's) is that it can transfix emotional states in space, making them "real", as it were. Yet it is compulsory that these states conform to at least some of the laws of non-human objects; Ferber goes in for this kind of supreme demeaning of passion by adding jagged, off-kilter "sides" to his swooping and outwards-turning copper strips, so that the fulsome three-dimensional line-in-space is hugged by a kind of afterthought of two-dimensionality. In some of his smaller sculptures expressive copper ovals and triangles beat against the sides of a restraining cage from which they could escape if there were any need to; there is, of course, that need, but it wouldn't exist without the cage, nor would the heroically mis-

shapen ovals and triangles. When you have all the room in the world there's simply no escaping it; eking out a little hard-earned elbow-room in space in the knowledge that space is infinite is, I think, what Ferber's sculpture is all about.

Sam Francis, a painter who came to the fore during that same forties-fifties period in which Ferber was first making his mark, enjoyed what was called a "mini-retrospective" at Martha Jackson this past month. As the works of the monolithic Abstract Expressionists go almost eagerly to take their place in the art historical parade, Francis continues to dip, drip and fly along into the seventies, free of the constraints of trailblazing brilliance that simultaneously date and elevate the paintings of men like Pollock and de Kooning. Which isn't to say that Francis wasn't an innovator, or that he isn't a great painter; his greatness is just more peculiar than that of the hard-core Abstract Expressionists, a peculiarity which has more obvious precedents than they (Riopelle, late Monet, Bonnard and Matisse), and which, paradoxically enough, doesn't threaten to put an end to the whole on-going artistic process as they do. On the contrary, Francis presages Frankenthaler and Louis, who, in turn, presage contemporary color painting; in each of the succulently beautiful paintings on view in this latest show (which tended to concentrate on those late fifties and sixties works in which freely-applied colors become the air in which the gently pulsing, dominant white background can breathe) could be read a kind of dazzling conviction that things must go on, that "gestural" energy is not all, that there is no end to what can be done with the elements of painting. This ever-slightly reactionary conviction is in itself monumental.

As for the presently dominant mode of color painting itself, avatars were everywhere present this month. At Fischbach we saw Doug Ohlson, who has turned away from his former hard-edged excursions to present us with canvases on which rich, deeply smoked color backgrounds give rise to clusters of luminous "sunspots" of various pastel persuasions. At certain points (that is, the points at which these sunspots *are*) the orbs threaten, through sheer force of pink or green, to break away; others tend to be only faintly differentiated from their backgrounds,

Sam Francis. *Number 5*, 1959. Gouache/paper, 26 x 40". Martha Jackson Gallery



