moving in a different direction. The result looks textural, but flat, like a batik print. He disturbs the monotony of the abundance of visual detail by the insertion of a few large, more nearly complete forms that have an organic, slow insistence about their presence. Rarely does he allow stabilizing horizontals or verticals to put the chaos of his intermeshed paint in order. He combines realistic imagery, such as a cartoonlike whale, with grids and organic forms, paralleling the use of both automatic and studied painting procedures in each painting. One is tempted, in the face of so much contradictory visual information, to beg for a return to more readable painting.

Don Cole's paintings are easier to read, with more considered compositions, and are, therefore, more effective. He uses thrusting diagonals, centered verticals, and groundline horizontals as large important units within the paintings. These elements throw his small detail into relief, forcing it into a position of lesser importance. One is especially grateful for this because much of this small incident consists of appended bits of trite, kitschy junk and a pastiche of painterly punning. Unfortunately, these attempts at humor only detract from the paintings' seriousness.

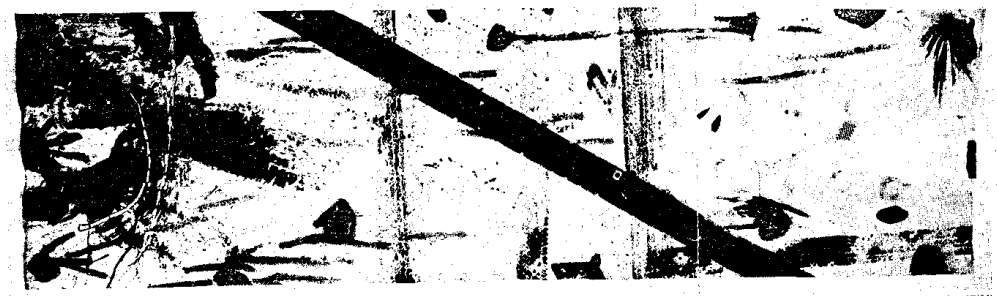
In his best work, *The Road to Lanado,* one tends to forgive him his vagaries. The artist plays large dynamic forms that pass through the field against dense nodes of complete forms, and a large area of freely applied paint. Horizontal dashes imply landscape depth which is contradicted by the large forms that reassert the painting's flatness. It is the most spatially complex work in his show, and seems to have been the most thoughtfully conceived painting in the entire dual exhibition.

It is a highly dubious procedure to make a work of art that embodies a wide range of contradictory attitudes toward the seriousness of painting itself. A work of art needs to be multileveled in its meaning, but may not be so in a self-destructive way. The combination of high art, decoration, and kitsch can only be successfully accomplished within total images that are brilliant enough to outshine their weakest parts.

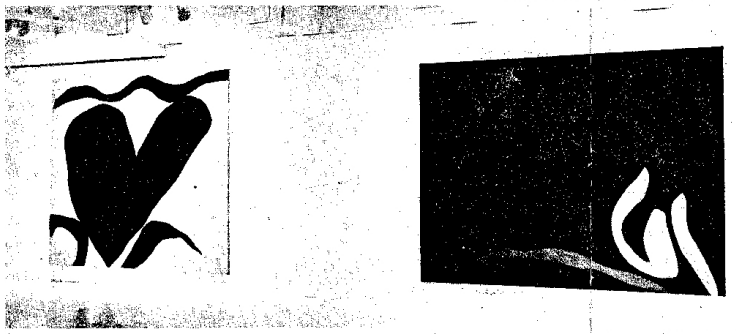
Charles Sheeler, who was a photographer as well as a painter, is often hailed as the father of recent developments in photo-Realism. His true son and heir may be ED RUSCHA, a painter, draftsman, and photographer living in Los Angeles. One can't help feeling their similarities in front of Ruscha's 14 recent drawings of stained sheets of paper. Precisely toned in gunpowder, single or stacked, their sharp, clean linearity, lucid light, and distinct shadows recall Sheeler's watercolors of sunlit factory walls. Their metallic silvery tonalities also conjure up his stark light contrasts.

Whereas Ruscha strives for an artless look in his photographs, his paintings have always been carefully composed and adjusted to the pictorial demands of flat surface and framing edge. Illusionism is indicated only to be contradicted in paintings like *Standard Station* of 1966 or *The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire,* 1965-68, in a manner similar to that of Sheeler. In contrast, Ruscha's photographs, as published in his various books — *Thirty-four Parking Lots, Nine Swimming Pools,* and *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* are three of the best — always seem to have been casually snapped. Human presence in a Ruscha photograph or painting (as in a Sheeler) is remarkably rare considering the spontaneity that apparently accompanied the shutter's click. Both men are object/form oriented. Ruscha's camera faces its subject head-on, centers it, and collects pertinent information about it. His paintings tend toward dynamic, diagonal compositions and the elimination of unimportant detail. Sheeler doesn't seem to have made such clear distinctions between the two media. He used them both to produce studied, idealized compositions. Ruscha has a tendency toward slick idealization in his paintings which causes them to border on cartoonlike simplicity. His photographs, on the other hand, share something with the unidealized documentary photography of the Depression years, though he tempers this with L.A. blandness.

I have gone into all these differences because I feel that Ruscha's recent drawings fall into a special place exactly in between his approaches to photography and painting. They are illusionistic, tonal, and



Don Cole, *The Road to Lanado,* 1972, m/m on canvas, 4'11" x 17'6".



Ray Parker, Installation view, 1973.

Ed Ruscha, *Three sheets with Castor Oil Stains,* 1973, gunpowder and castor oil on paper, 11½" x 29"

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The youngest photographers, WILLIAM DANE, HENRY WESSEL, JR., and GARY L. HALLMAN are the least interesting in the exhibition. Wessel's photographs of highways are often amusing, as in one of a large boulder flanked by two no parking signs. Dane makes postcards out of his rather random shots of the landscape which he sends to friends. Hallman works on selectively toned paper to achieve soft, out-of-focus prints (close-ups of a rose garden, a curb). The process of development is recorded as much as the landscape in this final manipulation of the medium and parallels with less interest what various artists are currently doing with film and video. It also, ironically, completes the circle by suggesting the earliest, most primitive beginnings of photography.

— ROBERTA PANCOAST SMITH

SALVATORE ROMANO, Max Hutchinson Gallery; DON COLE, RICHARD TUM SUDEN, Nancy Hoffman Gallery; ED RUSCHA, Castelli Gallery uptown; RAY PARKER, Fischbach Gallery uptown:

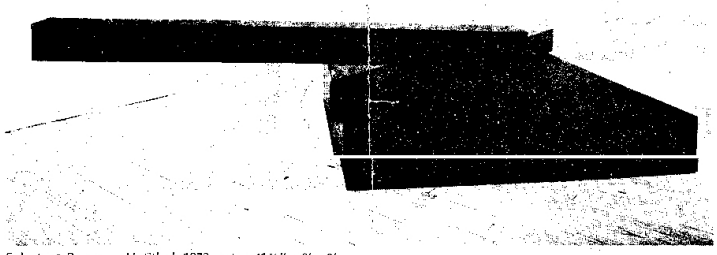
Nonfigurative sculpture usually refers either to architecture or to nature. Post-Minimal sculpture, for example, has largely been concerned with making a return to nature (random principles of distribution; accidental, gestural structuring; loose, organic, unmanufactured looking materials, etc.) in reaction to the rigorous architecturally oriented Minimal work of the mid-'60s. One of the problems Minimal sculpture often failed to solve involved its competition with architecture when located in an exterior urban setting. As a stand-in for architecture, it functioned to maximum effect when it pressed out against the confining walls of an art gallery or museum. Then, its rectilinear severities (or aberrations) could be read against the right angles of the room space.

More often than not the same Minimal piece that worked well in the gallery looked lost out-of-doors in an aggressive urban setting. Its unmodulated, unarticulated planes often seemed simple and toylike against the detailing of even the simplest building facade. The very lack of scale referents that made the piece seem oppressively massive in the gallery when measured against the diminutive size of the viewer, worked against it when the piece was faced with the inevitable scaling of window, mullion, and door to the overall shape of an ordinary building. (This is part of the reason why the girl's head by Picasso and the tree by Dubuffet operate better in their respective urban plazas than most of the boxy black pieces to be seen in such places elsewhere around town.) All the opposite factors come into play, of course, when a natural post-Minimal work is located out-of-doors in the countryside, but that is not my concern here.

SALVATORE ROMANO's sculpture, when considered in this light, is seen to be capable of operating as well in the gallery as in the country, or on an urban plaza for the reason that it combines both architectural and natural referents and procedures. His latest piece is a black 8' square less than 2' high. Its top is diagonally crossed from corner to corner by an 11' rectangle with 10" sides. An identical rectangle located above this one pivots 360° on a point located near one of the corners, where it connects to a block of styrofoam floating in a water tank hidden in the square unit below. The blocky base functions as a substitute for an architectural monolith in classic Minimal style, while the pivoting hypotenuse operates to stress the natural effect of air on a lightweight object floating in water. The base implies stasis, solidity, predictability, logical thinking, and the rational, ordered, manmade side of life. The floating hypotenuse, conversely, points to the arbitrary, unexpected, irrational aspects of nature. It adds a measure of Surrealist disorientation to Romano's strict Constructivism. (Similar effects occur in the drawing shown with the sculpture, with its loosely fanned graphite edges.) One viewer may find it playful, while another might resent the impurity it implies. I like the balance it provides.

Romano's new piece is intended, in fact, to be seen without its base when it is placed out-of-doors. Then the water tank will be set below the ground; only the two long rectangles, one stable, the other mobile, will be visible above ground. In his design of this particular piece, Romano has literalized his propensity to make indoor-outdoor sculpture that will operate effectively in any setting.

Like many Minimalists, Romano started out as a painter. But before he was a hard-edge geometrical painter, he was working in the



Salvatore Romano, *Untitled*, 1973, m/m, 41½" x 8' x 8'.

Abstract Expressionist mode. The automatist procedures he used at that time were submerged for many years, but they have reasserted themselves formally in the quasi-Surrealist surprises of his particular kineticism. After he started adding wooden projections in front of his geometrical paintings (literalizing their dimensionality) he moved directly off the wall to the floor. His first sculptures — *Da Da Dee* and *Zeno II* (which was in the "Primary Structures" show at the Jewish Museum) — were static but they hinted at movement. They *looked* as though they could move, like a Calder stabile does. These early pieces had complex, interlocking internal structures, and were rigidly geometrical. He moved next to arcing unitary shapes which rocked; then he began floating these pieces on water so they rocked naturally without specific propulsion.

Being more viscid than air, water provides a thicker cushion for an object floating in it. It creates a soft, gradual motion which is automatic, and yet natural. A Calder mobile moves similarly but with a less padded motion, and lacks the advantages of being earthbound that we traditionally associate with sculpture. Romano's recent work has gotten more complex than the unitary floating pieces of the late '60s. Water functions now only to engineer the kineticism of the piece, acting like an oiled ball joint or a gimbal. When natural air movements operate on an object floating on a perfectly protected surface like this (as opposed to the ocean) they bring about an eerie sensation of buoyancy that is, perhaps, only paralleled by weightlessness in outer space. No artist I know of except Romano uses these special properties of water in his or her art. Though there have been many floating sculptures — by Marta Pan, Robert Grosvenor, Alan d'Arcangelo and others — they have tended to be static and rigid on or in water. Romano is able to work effortlessly with the medium.

In the current period of post-Minimal impurity, a tendency to overdo is beginning to emerge that may undermine recent gains in pictorial complexity. There was considerable evidence to this effect on the walls of the Whitney Museum during the Biennial where overly detailed and redundant paintings seemed to predominate. Much the same must be said for the recent show of paintings by DON COLE and RICHARD TUM SUDEN at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery.

What possessed gallery or artists to mount a joint exhibition of two such similar painters is beyond my comprehension. Both artists use a wide variety of imagery and handling within a given work — Cole on loose sheets of canvas tacked to the wall, tum Suden on traditional stretched canvases. Both men disperse visual incident over their surfaces is such a way that the pigment seems to be located on a transparent screen in front of the picture plane. Figure-ground distinctions, in other words, are all too explicit. Depicted forms participate little in either the literal or the illusionist space of the canvas as a field, although paint is dripped, splattered, and stained into the canvas in widely differing strategies, and although there is deliberate overlapping. Both men employ a broad color spectrum, but tend to isolate their colored figures at least partially against the ground at all times, which compromises their color's opticality.

Richard tum Suden's paintings are packed with overlapping lattices of dot, stripe, and daub patterns, each