

## SANTA MONICA

### Ross Rudel at Angles

The forms of some of Ross Rudel's wood, leather and fabric wall sculptures might be compared with Edward Weston's photographic nudes, those flesh-padded conversions of skeletal geometry into the most generalized of organic curves. Thus Rudel's work can be placed in the body-art genre, as it was in Suzanne Ramljak's "Seductive Matter" exhibition in Houston and Washington last year (at Rice University and the Corcoran). But he can also stand free of that specificity and take a place with abstract sculptors such as Martin Puryear and John Duff, or be linked with other younger artists who share his respect for the contribution of craftsmanship to the impact and meaning of the work, such as Christopher Lucas or Christopher Hewat.

At Angles Rudel showed 12 works from 1995 and '96. Each modest-size sculpture commanded a generous space. From a distance the forms are minimalistic, just simple, elegant shapes with little embellishment. But surface contributes enormously to the effect of Rudel's work, and the close view is essential. It's from nearby that the workmanship is evident. It's also at this distance that the stretched leather most suggests human skin, particularly when bonded with a layer of undergarmentlike net or lace that is sometimes so integrated that it looks embossed or printed. Up close, one savors an almost gratuitous beauty. For instance, *Untitled No. 187* is a dark-stained, satin-polished wooden ball 4 inches in diameter to

which a real star-shaped, tiger-spotted blossom has been applied. The simplicity of the form and the drama of the flower's shape and patterning give this work the power of an icon or an apparition.

*Untitled No. 185* is a rounded floor piece of stained wood and rawhide nestled so tightly into a corner that one thought of an animal trying to burrow out of sight. Its size, 18 by 18 by 19 inches, supports that association, but its inflated smoothness doesn't.

*Untitled No. 196* is a turned-wood pole 1 3/4 inches in diameter and 10 feet tall. While the cylindrical undulations of the pole are attractive (like a bedpost or chair leg aspiring to be the *Endless Column*), this piece was most interesting as spatial punctuation, an exclamation mark among all the globular dot-forms in the show. The largest work was the most suggestively erotic. *Untitled No. 198* is a wall-mounted 4-by-5-foot ellipse almost 2 feet thick. The warm tan leather folds into an undulating curve at the center that suggests neither mouth nor navel nor anus but some unspecified seductive pucker.

Whatever the materials used, Rudel's sculpture conveys a sense of calm, a feeling that he works at it until everything is right. The show could have been tiresome if all the sculptures had the sexual suggestion of skin and lace, but fortunately that was just one sensory take among many equally satisfying options.—Janet Koplos



Ross Rudel: Installation view, 1996; at Angles.