

Siri Berg: The Act of Illusion

Palmer Poroner

Painting is an art of illusion. What isn't there is made to appear, a far greater achievement than the magician who makes what is there disappear. But when Siri Berg creates the illusion, she does it on several levels. Here is a simple suction cup. It is still a suction cup but it also has an existence as a work of art. Presto, all is in the illusion. Siri Berg has not only altered the cup, the machined object, she has changed its very nature, its true quality, its significance in existence.

An End to Rules

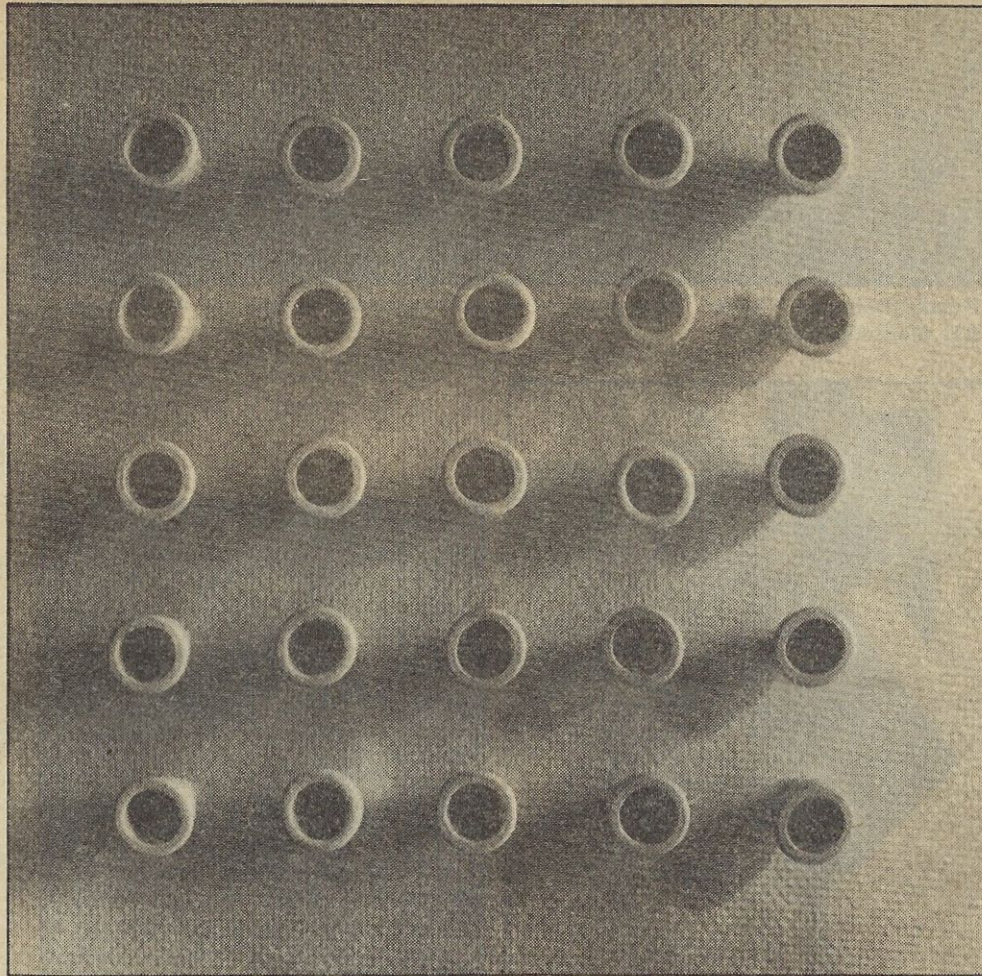
Siri Berg, in her charming manner, has sidled past the rules of art. She is no longer a painter, though she usually paints. This new work is all, in essence, in three dimensions, though as yet in low relief. It bears upon the realm of sculpture. It is environment, one says, a conveniently indefinite term. Berg uses this term, with reason. One should call her a mini-environmental sculptor. As the French say, voila!—a painter no longer. Siri Berg has created a new artist of herself—for now. This is indeed necromancy.

Smallness a Challenge

As many of the anti-artists of today have turned to small sizes, so has Siri Berg. The small shall be large, as I understood when Ruth Abrams did her mini-paintings of the cosmos. One must deny one's parents in order to assert a new generation of art. If the new art is to be anything, it must reject the mural mode of recent art. Let Leo Castelli build larger and larger galleries for his artists. That goes back to the sixties-and beyond.

The Flip Side of the New Art

Siri Berg creates art from junk. The castaways of the machinery we use today are metamorphosed by the magic of art into objects of beauty. This has been done before in a different way, but Siri Berg also presents her art in its own context. The artist has not only made the found machined object beautiful, but she has set it in a world of its own. The metamorphosis is both of image and of the entire environment. Thus, we have "New Environmental Boxes".



Siri Berg "White Holes" at Bjorn Lindgreen 575 Madison, No.508, (56-57), Nov. 17-Dec. 16).

Raising Questions

What comment is this artist making about a society which may not touch the precious object, the semi-precious stone? Is there a rejection of pollution, physical, moral, psychological? Is this a separation from the society of our time or from society in general? How central is the significance of junk? After

all, many artists today are trying to make art become junk, in a revolt, an anti-art revolt. Why in turn make junk become art?

It takes an artist of significance to raise such questions. Also, it takes an achievement in the art itself to make the viewer take such questions seriously. Are the "New Environmental Boxes" escape from reality or are they a recognition of just that, of the true nature of

reality, that reality needs to be separate from our psyche, from our art? Answers to such questions must be seen in the art itself.

A Wholly New Exhibition

It has been three years since Siri Berg, an active producer and exhibitor on the New York scene since 1970, has shown totally new work. The box idea originated in partial form in 1974 with the "Phases" series when Siri Berg made mini-boxes as working maquettes for large paintings, to see how they might look on one wall of a room. Later, the box evolved along with the three dimensionality and subsequent found pieces. Evolution gained momentum till Siri Berg made leaps and bounds instead of strides in her inventions. From painstakingly built up reliefs came the found pieces, the circles being industrial rings—O rings, belts or gaskets. Berg used them as whole circles or cut them in arcs. Once removed from the technical limitation of the "Four Elements" series, Berg found quick liberation from the circle motif, though she often uses it. What remains to this day is her system, the pattern of single bold object, ("Singularities") or the 'odd couple' ("Mirror, Mirror"), and the five by five (five rows with five columns) that Siri Berg evolved over the years.

Art as Object

But it is the value infused in this small object of art that is the compelling aspect of Siri Berg's art. The champion Knicks called it "intensity." The daring is formidable, just as this artist as a teen-ager left her native Sweden past the Nazi flotilla for America, all alone. Character shows.

In creating her art, Siri Berg transforms her object in subtle ways. For the true artist, not many touches are needed, just the right touch. In truth, her vision creates the art to begin with. Siri Berg displays a grasp of the totality of the image she has discovered. One could say she is *not* changing an object, only enhancing its inner nature by the way she manages to present it. What art is greater than the discovery of reality?

ARTS PERMANENT

NEW YORK, N.Y.

— A BI-WEEKLY GALLERY REVIEW —

Vol. III, No. 9, November 12, 1981