

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

## VISUAL ARTS

### Branching out

Scott White Contemporary Art launches a new space with a pair of exhibits

By Robert L. Pincus  
ART CRITIC

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Sensuousness and simplicity come together in DeWain Valentine's works cast in resin. The shapes are elemental; they are free-standing circles, rectangular or triangular columns and post-and-lintel configurations distilled to their essence. Yet as a colorist, he is intent on being seductive, offering up, in successive works, a lush blue, an ethereal gray and an atmospheric mix of brown and blue.

These sculptures, dating from the late 1960s and early 1970s, are Valentine's best-known work. And a modest exhibition of them, entitled "Circles and Columns of Transparent Colored Light and Space," is one of two shows that christen the new, larger space of Scott White Contemporary Art in Little Italy.

These works by Valentine are representative of what has come to be known as both "finish fetish" and "light and space" art, with surfaces that capture soak up and reflect the light around them. They also are mirror-like, turning their surroundings into the shifting imagery on their surfaces.

Valentine's art doesn't have the reach of Robert Irwin's and James Turrell's, the major figures of the light and space school that originated in Los Angeles in the 1960s. But little art does.

That doesn't take anything away from these sculptures. They've aged well. They are best when big. "Blue Circle," 70-1/4 inches in diameter, creates a kind of quiet force field, evoking sky or sea in the ethereal nature of its blue.

Though smaller in scale, circles imbued with rose and gray or rose and gold still have a presence – and presence is a prime virtue of this work.

**"Circles and Columns of Transparent Colored Light and Space," sculptures by DeWain Valentine, and "Inaugural Exhibition," works by Frank Stella, Donald Sultan, Christopher Reilly and others**

#### Squash, sculptures

Toys shrink the world, which is one big reason children love them. Artists have figured out that you can make toys into a subject for sculpture by enlarging them greatly.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art has a seminal example on its new concourse: Charles Ray's "Firetruck." Its cheap detailing done large makes the big version pretty amusing – and strange.

The same goes for Yoram Wolberger's "Indian #4" (2007), a central element of the "Inaugural Exhibition" at Scott White. He takes a cheap plastic figurine as his subject, a spear-carrying Indian, and makes it 6-1/2-foot tall. Is that a gimmicky concept? Sure. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have a kind of inexplicably magical presence to it. Whether the choice of figure is sardonic or affectionate is left to the viewer to decide.

Wolberger's sculpture is also something of a technical feat. What makes it seem even stranger is just how uncannily the big version mimics a tiny one, right down to the excess plastic fringes along its edges.

Pigment prints by the San Francisco artist restore his Indian to his diminutive scale. He's pictured from multiple perspectives, as a gunslinger in blue.

Frank Stella, who helped to define minimalist painting in the 1960s, had gone to a different extreme by the early 1980s, creating immense wall-mounted works in etched and painted aluminum that contain a virtual explosion of shapes. "Mossport" (1982) – more than 10 feet tall and wide – is one of them. These are impressive, though not as groundbreaking or brilliant as his work from the 1960s.

There was a lot of really big painting in the 1980s. Remember Julian Schnabel's pictures covered with broken crockery?

Donald Sultan came to prominence then and deservedly so, as "Squash October 6, 1989" attests. The bulging vegetables are dominated by green; the space around it by tar spackle. It's all executed with a sure eye and hand.

Only one other work is as noteworthy: Christopher Reilly's new "Untitled" painting. The San Diego-based painter continues to demonstrate his mastery of the encaustic medium, creating magnetic canvases in which atmospheric surfaces surround precisely executed flowers. They imbue nature with a palpably dreamlike aura.

**When:** Through May 31

**Where:** Scott White Contemporary Art, 939 W. Kalmia Ave., Little Italy

**Tickets:** Free

**Phone:** (619) 501-5689

**Online:** scottwhiteart.com