

Gallery Paule Anglim

## Everyday Objects, Concisely

**Gay Outlaw's works include forms made from pencils and other ordinary items, many crafted with economy and tastefulness.**

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

December 5 2001

About 10 years ago, it was fashionable for artists to put everyday content back into Minimalism's stripped-down forms. Using everything from lipstick to chocolate, they constructed cubes, spheres and slabs typical of that industrial-strength style. San Francisco-based artist Gay Outlaw continues to mine this vein, crafting handsome objects that are animated by the illusion of movement.

At the University Art Museum at Cal State Long Beach, a pleasant little survey features 17 modestly scaled works and one room-size sculpture from the last five years. The earliest consist of colored pencils Outlaw has glued together lengthwise, forming thick cylinders out of which she has carved two baseball-size spheres.

Their finely sanded surfaces and perfectly circular silhouettes suggest that they were made with machines, probably woodshop tools designed to cut decorative bedposts and furniture legs. But rather than evoking the presence of such specialized machinery, Outlaw's blue and red "Pencil Balls" recall ordinary pencil sharpeners, classroom tools familiar to every school kid. Think of each small sculpture as a diminutive globe. On its north and south poles, the colored lead of a single pencil forms a pair of round dots. As your eye moves away from these points, curved cross-sections of other pencils form increasingly elliptical shapes. At the equator, they become inch-long lines whose rounded ends make them appear to be swiftly drawn, like the marks cartoonists often add to figures to make them look as if they're moving.

Your eye picks up speed and slows down as it skims across the smooth surfaces of these abstract works. At the same time, your mind travels through them, following individual pencils from one end to the other.

With great economy of means, Outlaw's clever pieces address such traditional sculptural issues as the relationship between surface and depth, outside and inside. They also play off of the Ben-day dots that appear in the Sunday comics, giving them the user-friendly demeanor of much Pop and Op Art.

Other pieces made from pencils elaborate upon these themes, but never as concisely. While "Pencil Cube" follows the logic of its perpendicularly configured elements to articulate a diagonally divided form, the convex and concave formats of "Shield I" and "Shield II" lack such structural rigor. "Pencil Wave" and "Nest" are even

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more random. No rhyme or reason lies behind their curvaceous contours, except that of tastefulness.

If tastefulness is an artist's main objective, there's no reason to limit oneself to pencils. In "Snickey Snak" and "Black Hose Mountain," Outlaw uses lengths of black rubber dishwasher hose filled with plaster in the same way that she uses pencils, gluing them side by side and cutting their ends at odd angles. Considerably thicker and longer, these materials allow her to work at a much larger scale. But size proves to be no replacement for resolution. Although initially impressive, the 10-foot-tall and 15-foot-wide "Black Hose Mountain" appears to be a hollow prop, an arbitrary thing whose structure and materials are too loosely linked to be convincing.

In five shallow sculptural reliefs that hang on the wall, Outlaw replaces pencils with cigarette-size dowels of wood. Glued in loose clusters, these irregular forms protrude from blue, red, yellow or orange panels, casting cloud-like shadows that shift positions as you do. This remedial shadow-play pales in comparison to posters that are obvious knockoffs of Op Art, not to mention original Light-and-Space works, whose scrutiny of perception is infinitely more sophisticated than Outlaw's pop-up-book version.

More successful is a series of cubes and stepped forms through which she has drilled rows of precisely aligned holes. Angled diagonally, these negative spaces play off of one-point perspective, transforming solid chunks of cement and synthetic materials into airy structures whose delicacy recalls lace.

The cube with the widest holes is the best because it most effectively turns a volume into almost nothing but surface. To look at it from some angles is to look through it. Rather than filling one of Minimalism's classic forms with ordinary objects and everyday content, Outlaw empties it further. Replacing a static substance with energy-riddled space, she sets your mind in motion. Sometimes it's satisfying to wonder just where the art is.

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University Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, (562) 985-7602, through Dec. 16. Closed Mondays.