

Exuberant Steel, Leaden Pencil

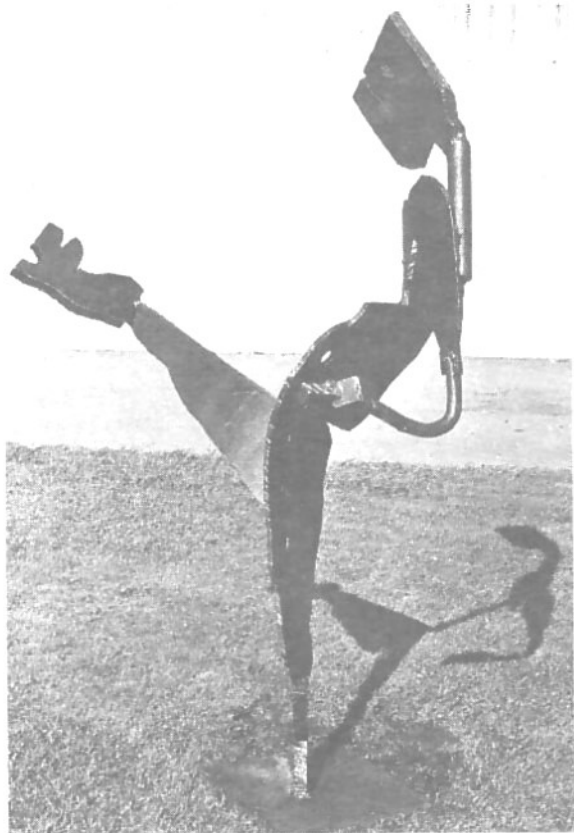
San Francisco / Suzaan Boettger

After weeks of passing Jeff Whyman's figural sculptures as they appeared to cavort through the arcade of UC Berkeley Kroeber Hall, it was satisfying to discover that they lost none of their vitality when confined inside the more dimly lit Source Gallery. The tall creatures, caught in wildly flamboyant postures, still express a gaiety that dramatically contradicts their substance of plates and bars of steel. By comparison, Amy Goldman's series of monochromatic Prisma pencil drawings of piled sacks or long-leaf plants suffer from her severely restrained approach to the medium.

As her contribution to *Introductions 80*, Goldman presents several triptychs all drawn in a narrow tonal range of pinks, tans and ochers. Her subjects are sacks of flour loosely stacked on a pallet, piles of sandbags with their ends pulled tight and tied, rows of dangling exhaust pipes and tangled sea plants. Repetition of forms within each work extends to duplication between them; not only are all the colors similar, but all the textures, organic or otherwise, are identical — that of heavy drawing paper. Any one of these works is initially interesting, but a roomful does not withstand scrutiny. Goldman displays a fine ability to render line and volume of these loose and bulbous forms; her compositions, however, are almost entirely without necessary tension.

A triptych with vertical orientation, *Succulents II*, is more absorbing. Flowing tendrils in upper and lower sections — details of budding cones above, abundant white space below — bracket the broadly spreading center of the plant. It draws one in, bearing a similar appeal to the oversize flowers of Georgia O'Keeffe, but contains a texture and complexity entirely its own.

In exhibiting Whyman's unusual sculptures, the Source Gallery fulfills the function of *Introductions* in the best possible manner; by presenting genuine innovation from a younger artist. Whyman's oversized figures — performing fanciful arabesques, frenetic leaps or playful pivots — radiate a loose-limbed exuberance based on exaggeration of posture and precarious balance. Yet each is anatomically correct and can be identified with viscerally. Their lively gestures are underscored by the seemingly spontaneous, gestural use of the torch that cut the curving sections out of plates, welded the addition of tubular arms or dollops of metal which serve as nipples, or punctured irregular holes for eyes and buttons. The planar figures recall Picasso's expressionistic paintings of dancers (especially his 1925 *Dancers*), their silhouettes displaying a fluidity



JEFF WHYMAN: NEW WAVE DANCER, welded steel, 6½' h., at Source Gallery, San Francisco.

similar to line drawing.

Instead of dominated by the ponderous formalism characteristic of much steel sculpture, Whyman's work is expressively plastic. He uses steel in the tradition of bronze figural sculpture: to convey human sentiments. Whyman's smaller cast bronze figures — with thin spires of hair standing on end and wide globular eyes — appear more like distorted grotesques. Their undulating fleshy bodies bear impressions of the fingers that have formed them in pliable wax; the bronze resembles the softer surface of human skin, but the figures do not describe distinctive psychological moods.

In both groups of imaginative metal creatures, the rich patina prevents them from assuming cartoonlike silliness. However, the larger figures, possessing a lighthearted vivacity saved from banality by taut abstraction, and supported by the tensile strength of steel, are the works that have the spirit as well as the physical attributes of human presence. □