

Allan Wexler at Ronald Feldman

In quantity and scope, Wexler's exhibition was more appropriate to a museum than a gallery. In the main room were 30 works on pedestals, six tables offering between 1 and 12 works and, on a long shelf and the adjacent wall, 19 works of the "Sets" series. In the north gallery were 18 small paintings on plywood and 22 so-called "Experiments." In tone, however, the exhibition might have been more appropriate to the comedy stage than to either a museum or a gallery. The works, like comic TV skits, are based on well-accepted conventions that are drawn out or inverted for humorous effect. Coffee cups on a table are connected by hoses so that the level of the liquid they contain will be uniform; an adjustable table is lifted by balloons. One was drawn into the teeming display as each work seemed to top its predecessor in exaggeration and absurdity. Some of the bits were more deserving of applause than others, but together they constituted a memorable performance. But wit is only a part of this work.

The works on pedestals comprised a series called "30 Proposals for a Picnic Area"—vitrine-encased models of a sloping hillside with a building or picnic set. Here Wexler can be read as the architect he is—a little more whimsical than most. The way he conflates the furniture with its architectural surround or even with the landscape indicates that something odd is going on. For example, the legs of a chair may penetrate the floor of a little one-room building within the vitrine and extend into the ground, while the chair's back pokes through the ceiling à la *Alice in Wonderland* and the line of the seat reaches out to join the horizon. Extension may, in fact, be a philosophical stance here: the chair, the building, the city are clearly not meant to exist in isolation.

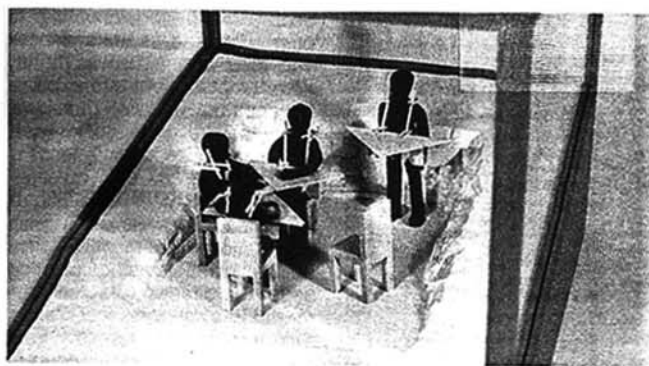
Wexler's dogged commitment to a few basic forms suggests that he finds thematic resonance in repetition and variation. This stratagem is particularly apparent in the "Sets" and the 18 paintings, which are permutations of the axonometric projection of a simple table. The numbers are immoderate, and admittedly proliferation is a fashionable esthetic tactic just now. But unlike most art of excess, these works are not flamboyant and do not seem impelled by emotion. Rather, Wexler demonstrates almost parodically the nature of linear thinking: he studies a form or a setting with scientific thoroughness (the "Experiments" are like half-witted science-fair entries—e.g., *Air/No Air*, in which tiny tables have been set afire inside glass jars, one with a perforated lid, one airtight). Wexler tries out every permutation he can think of and shows little inclination to edit; his linear thinking doesn't stop when it comes to that border called "reasonable proof." He pushes far beyond, and the results have a quirky charm—as well as the hint of menace that comes with being unreasonable.

This repetition and development might be seen as filmic. Series evolve in time. The "30 Proposals" are like alternate storyboards. His arrangements of tables and chairs suggest scenes of intimacy that are like the family narratives of playwright A.R. Gurney. Wexler, who has been using the table-and-chair format for 15 years, treats furniture groupings as loci for personal contact. And yet he mocks the social implications of furniture by devising "logical" structures that would actually impede social interaction. One of the pedestal pieces, for example, is a quadripartite table for four in which each person wears his part of the table strapped to his shoulders—it goes with him when he walks away. In another of the "30 Proposals," the chairs in one room of a little building are physically controlled by the movement of chairs in another

room, through an elaborate and impractical lumber superstructure.

Wexler's works would be easier to see as "sculpture" and would also be more sensorially satisfying if they were larger. But his miniaturization is consistent with architectural model-making and encourages imaginative projection—as does, for example, the scale of a dollhouse or a comic book. Diminution, by making space considerations more intellectual than actual, drives home the point that his works are ultimately a demonstration of thinking. That's satisfying enough.

—Janet Koplos



Allan Wexler: *One Table Worn By Four People*, 1989, plaster, acrylic, basswood, glass and wax, 11 by 12 by 15 inches; at Ronald Feldman.