

"Peter Ambrose: Recent Sculpture"

Through Nov. 4; Scott White Contemporary Art
2400 Kettner Blvd., Loft 238, Little Italy; free; (619) 501-5689 or www.scottwhiteart.com

ART REVIEW

DISTANT RELATIONS

Neighboring exhibits of solid sculpture and fantastical surrealism have craftsmanship in common



Peter Ambrose streamlines the human form in geometrically inclined sculptures, like "Female Figure II." Scott White Contemporary Art

By Robert L. Pincus
ART CRITIC

Peter Ambrose's art takes us back — a century or thereabouts, when Brancusi was stripping sculpture down to elemental shapes and Picasso, Braque and like-minded artists were turning picture and object alike into the geometry of cubism.

Not that Ambrose's sculptures look similarly radical. He reminds us of an often repeated phenomenon: One era's innovations are the next one's expressions of good taste. And if there is a primary word for the 14 sculptures and two drawings on view at Scott White Contemporary Art, it is tasteful. He aims to please the senses, without challenging any established notions of what a sculpture can be.

The Chicago sculptor, who last exhibited with Scott White eight years ago, has lost none of his ability to seduce the eye with his refined shapes in wood and lead. Craftsmanship is a strong suit.

He has retained his zest for using the figure as the source for his sculptures, turning torsos and limbs into arrangements of forms that are slightly varied but generally repeated.

Some of Ambrose's constructions are slender, like "Young Woman" and "Merlin," with their sleek, dark vertical sections in mahogany. He constructs them, as if he had in mind to retool the human form into a streamlined totem. Other sculptures have bulges. A good example is the lead-skinned "Female Figure II." It consists of a stack of sectioned spheres, supported by a pair of ample legs.

Ambrose mostly favors free-standing sculptures. But he doesn't ignore the possibilities of the wall-mounted sculpture. "Untitled (Reclining Nude)" is pale — done in maple — and hints at the stated subject with the horizontal spread of its loosely rectangular sections.

A dash of humor enters the show in the form of "Show Girl," a piece that does conjure up a dancer in motion with its small number of poplar segments. But the exhibition as whole, for all of its technical strength and abundance of elegance, is too studied, too self-conscious about its virtues. It's hard not to think that a little more risk and little less polish would be a boon to Ambrose's art.