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Chapel Hills

de Sergio de Camargo

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The exhibition of the Brazilian born (in 1930) sculptor Sergio de Camargo, at the Marlborough, represents both a departure and a continuation from his previous work, and is remarkably successful. In these dim days, it is interesting to see what works well by gas-light as well as by spotlight; and these luminous, carved Carrara marble sculptures look good in shadowy flickering light, in daylight, and in spotlight.

Camargo is best known for his clever painted wooden wall hanging white reliefs, made up of hosts of rods deployed across a surface, sustaining interest by means of shadows caused by the varying depth of the cut wooden cylinders. His work has always had a purity of form, enlivened paradoxically by the underlying and exuberant romanticism of his kind of purity, which is far from the intellectually motivated constructivism of some artists whose work bears superficial similarity to Camargo's.

Now he has further extended himself. He has taken blocks of marble and made leaning towers and small reliefs. Each piece is, like his other work too, brilliantly worked out from simple structural elements. There are opulent (at rods extending horizontally in sinuous movement), and three pieces where one or two forms can be moved or rocked from side to side. But, for me, by far the most successful pieces, are the stacked blocks,

which use the simple elements to make something resoundingly complex and subtle, which, as the spectator walks round the whole piece, continually changes form, by the varieties of angles and depths which relate each block to the other. Equally satisfying are the marble reliefs which use little sharp edged geometric shapes.

One of the interesting aspects of Camargo's work is that he has worked equally well on intimate and monumental scale. Scale should be thought, but it doesn't really seem to matter. Whatever element he chooses as his unit, and from which he then diverges in variation, is just fine when I first saw the show. I thought the elegance of the sharply cut marble meticulously polished in whispered, effracted lines, diminished Camargo's sculpture, making it trivial, clinically immaculate. There was something homely about the white painted wood he used to work with, which was touching in spite of the precision of that sculpture. And indeed some of the pieces are just too decorative, chic arrangements in marble. But some have an austere beauty and a complexity of form that is sustained from any angle.

There is an interesting interview with Camargo in the January issue of *Studio International* in which he remarks that his "direct problem is to investigate and work with plastic elements . . . It is I who make the least

them, others who see them . . . I think that every artist makes an emotional transference into the object and the object is capable of passing this transference on to the spectator. Art has a huge capacity for emotional communication, even with the most abstract elements; you can say just about anything."

I've just seen my first big exhibition of work by Lynn Chadwick, at the Marlborough, and I wish I hadn't. Chadwick has bounced back into figurative, deploying with curious insouciance and feebleness modernist idioms. Basically, the sculptures, all literally figurative, explore male-female relationships, setting the visored man next to the triangle-headed woman, there at a lot of single figures about town. The masses of figures are handled awkwardly. Chadwick's undoubted popularity, particularly abroad, doesn't obscure the feeling I have at any time that here are modernist idioms at the reluctant service of the facile emotion rendered by the kind of narratives published by the least imaginative women's magazines. It's a case for recycling and starting again: where is the firmness of yesterday?

Obviously, popular is not, repeat not, a synonym for bad; and I don't know what pressures Chadwick has been under. But the sentimental superficiality which is the effect of these hosts of figures is dispiriting, to say the least.