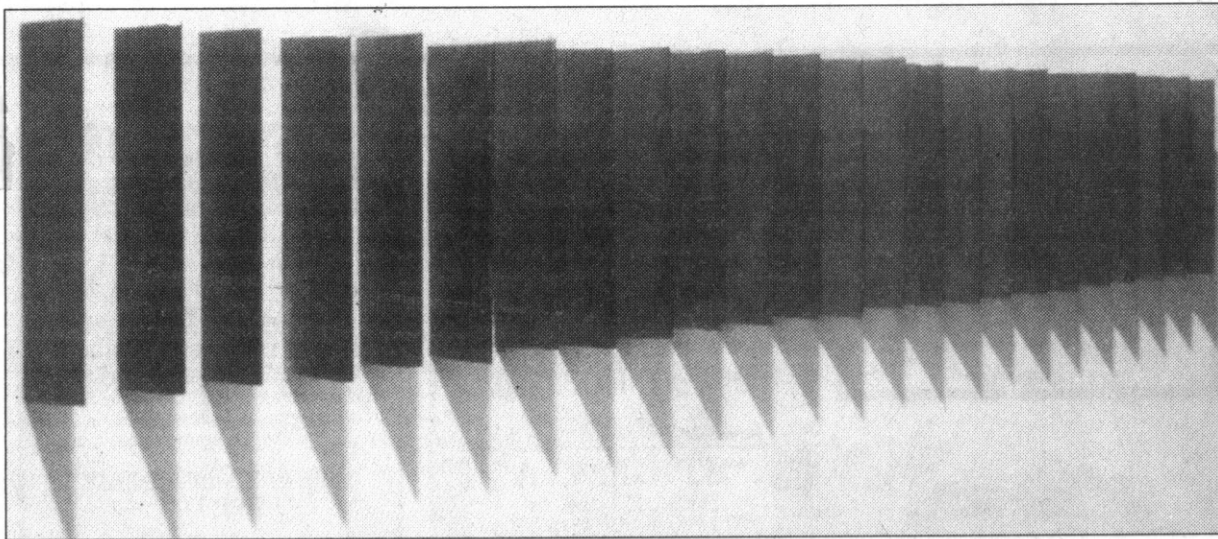


Arts & Antiques



"Light and Steel"

Ledy's sculptures on exhibit

By Jeanette Fintz

For Hudson Valley Newspapers

Ann Ledy's drawings and architecturally responsive sculpture test your awareness of small sensations. Ledy's installation at Art Design Digression Ltd. displays a minimalist's hyper-sensitive, nearly reverential approach to her materials, which are for the most part steel, aluminum, silk, mesh screens and vellum. In two of her most compelling and mesmerizing pieces, "Diptych 1-3" and "Spielstuck," Ledy meditates on whisper thin layers of silvery light and hypnotically subtle shifts of space. And if you slow down enough to appreciate these exquisite fragments of light and texture, you might also realize that this cool and apparent cerebral work is as voluptuous in its union of air and surface as any water droplet on a Fantin-Latour rose — except that Ledy's moment of time, space and light is without sentimentality or nostalgia. Her work grounds the viewer in the present by consistently specifying the actual surroundings as its reference point, in this case, the ADD gallery.

The installation literally draws the gallery space into collusion with the work, though it doesn't have to coax much, so in sync are its proportions, materials and exposed tech style with those of the artist. Ledy's love of architecture and interior design come through first in the interdependence between the work, both 2-D and 3-D, and the available light and the physical dimensions of the walls and floor. Perhaps even more critical in appreciating the work is factoring in the human presence and sensory apparatus which completes the aesthetic circuit.

Ledy's traditional minimalist devices, like repetition and modular components, and her motifs, particularly the circle in the square, play off each other in the two rooms of this compact but spacious show. It is not that the individual pieces cannot stand alone, but that their very nature is episodic, being more about having revealed to you fleeting insights into the habits of light form and space which are part of an ongoing greater continuum of experience.

For example, the primarily spatial concerns of the piece "Untitled #7," made of repeated vertically aligned imperfectly matched steel slats perpendicularly attached to the wall, become graphic concerns when viewed frontally. These in turn inform the series of hypnotic graphite and vellum drawings, "Suite 1-8." By orienting the lines horizontally, the controlled irregularities of length, pressure and near concavity or convexity build to evocative optical effects of relative depth and movement as well as suggesting clouds, water and electronic interference patterns.

These pieces, like much of the best work in this show, begin by seeming to tell us something we thought we already knew, and then proceed to simply show us by their blend of matter and phenomena how much more we are capable of noticing. While artists like Donald Judd and Agnes Martin come to mind, for instance, what is unique is the way Ledy warms up the work with "imperfections" and opens the work to the viewer through recognition of commonplace occurrences, like shadows, for instance.

In the previously mentioned "Untitled #7" and in "Untitled #1," in which an irregularly aligned stack of steel tables loom overhead, the reflected shadows are part of the shape perception of each piece. They construct an illusion of depth, in "Untitled #1" and produce layered shape echoes of various temperatures. Similar shadow/edge/depth sensitivity is noticeable in rice paper drawings of circles and squares which are freely attached to their supports. The curling rice paper edge makes a soft grey shadow, creating a shallow ghostly plane beneath each page, blurring the boundaries between flat and relief space. (This group reverberates in another important piece, so I will discuss it further along.)

Ledy's preoccupation with levels of apparent depth shows up again in "Diptych #1-3," mesh and screen pieces which are the absolute stars of the show. Mounted to the wall with silvery nails, the edges of the two pieces of material are left free to indicate their positions. As the overlapping warp and west lines create shimmering moire-like patterns, shifting back and forth as we move in front of them,

the subtle lifting and disalignment of the screens raises what was a drawing idea up to a deeper relief space, delighting the eye with its unpredictability.

Given Ledy's interest in architecture, it doesn't come as a surprise that a single drawing-based notion should reconfigure in 3-D form. What can be surprising is the ephemeral derivation of the more dimensional incarnation, which brings me to the most complex and mysterious work, "Spielstuck." As it is reproduced on the announcement, it is literally a "plan view," viewed squarely above the piece, the concentric overlapping squares of silk on aluminum are photographed to make the most of the layered field and frame of warm and cool greys. The contrasting textures and the shallow space set off a centered small, dark, apparently round, though truly cylindrical form, as we can see from the visible shadow. The circle in the square motif taken from the litho crayon drawings, complete with shadowy edge, again provides the elemental material for this sculpture.

"Spielstuck" is presented in this show on a rectangular base of about three-foot high and inside a Plexiglas cover of about six-inches high and 10-inches square, creating another boundary line inside and around the perimeter of the top surface of the piece and significantly changing our relationship to the work. The word "spielstuck" is German for game piece, cluing us into the possible reading of the concentric squares as a game board. The small tin object, which is the one player in this game, appears to be permanently affixed to its central location. The Plexiglas cover lends a precious and aggrandized air to the whole piece and also changes the scale relationship we have had to it as a "thing" in our own space to an architect's model, perhaps for a model in a style leaning toward the vast proportions of Italian architecture in the 1930s. The two-inch high accordion-pleated support of strategically white-painted aluminum takes on the connotations of a building facade and the central cylinder that of a human presence on a plaza. A related shallow floor piece, "Axis 1," comprised of one steel square imbedded inside a larger wooden one, with a three-inch high steel cylinder standing inside it, reinforces the importance of the vertical dimension as an emblem of a human presence and appears to support the "monumental" and memorializing connotations of "Spielstuck," though the latter is more mysterious.

The cover mediates between us and the surface of the piece, controlling the air space above it, giving the piece specified vertical dimensions. The shining clear edges of the cover, like drawing lines, elucidate the "visions" of the central "figure." The tin cylinder is the focus of all four corners, the center of this universe, and perhaps the creator of this transparent housing, as well as its viewer, Leonardo Da Vinci's drawing of the proportions of man's outstretched limbs generating the proportions of the circle and square provide an informed source for Ledy's work, while suggesting an anatomical derivation for the player's, location. One is reminded, as well, of the small figures representing the perceiving human intelligence in the Romantic landscape painting of Caspar David Fredriech, with whom we were to share the aesthetic appreciation of nature's magnificence. In any event, the feeling conveyed by this piece is certainly one of grandeur.

The role of the tin cylinder as player, viewer and locus in this piece becomes increasingly intriguing when you realize that it is not permanently attached to the center, but can move freely anywhere, its potential for spontaneity and asymmetry certainly living up to the game board function. Again, a surprise is that the player is a rather humble tin canister, and can open, perhaps containing some of its own secrets. One true thing about her work is the more you see, the more you see.

Ledy's exhibition will be on view at Art Design Digression Ltd. at 22 Park Place in Hudson through Oct. 11. Gallery hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday; noon to 6 p.m. Saturday; 1-5 p.m. Sunday; noon to 5 p.m. Monday; and by appointment. For information, call (518) 822-9763.