

Still Shapes Moving

By Katerina Mery

Upon entering the gallery that houses Brian Wall's *Squaring the Circle* exhibition in the de Saisset Museum, I immediately took note of its spaciousness. I was acutely aware that in the gallery it was just me, and the artwork— absolutely alone, together with nothing else. The exhibition is displayed in two separate rooms and will be on display until the fourteenth of June. Each has three grey blue walls and one blaring yellow one, with an even texture that somehow makes them unobtrusive. Despite the vastness of space in the galleries, neither felt empty. Contrarily, the lack of clutter or any other distractions allowed the art to fill the room completely. This tastefully simple environment allows the artwork to come alive and serves as the perfect backdrop upon which to present Brian Wall's art.

The exhibit is composed of a combination of three dimensional sculptures and two dimensional drawings. Nearly void of color, the artwork places an intense, pointed focus on shape and form. The absence of color in Wall's work sharpens this focus; there are no loud hues to detract from the forms themselves. In fact, the only presence of color in the entire exhibit is on the museum walls from which the art hangs. Here the color is so simple, plain, and bright that it serves more as a reminder of the lack of color in the works than anything else. Consequently, it redirects the viewer's attention back to shape and movement.

The drawings feature bold black ink against an off-white papery cloth surface. None contain any recognizable geometric forms, but in viewing them I felt compelled to seek out familiar figures, as though the black areas were fragments of something that was once a defined shape. For example, in a series of paintings entitled "Black Square I, II, III, and IV", I felt I was observing the remnants of a massacred square. The ink is splattered, smudged, and separated into several almost completely disconnected parts. Yet, with some creative thought, one could imagine that the figures once

composed a unified and symmetric square. In doing this, the paintings became vivid and interesting to me. This, I believe, was Wall's intention. Life and movement are evident in these paintings as one envisions the destruction of the square. The other pieces suggest movement in different ways—whether through defined, aggressive brush strokes or the flow of exposed white through the black paint.

Movement is similarly evident in Wall's three dimensional structures. Each is composed of five stainless steel bending square prisms, connected to one another in such a way that through contrast there is a sense of organic movement that accents the sculptures' sharp lines, angles, and industrial material. One of the sculptures, "Ninna," completely defies gravity through the arrangement of the square prisms. They are balanced atop one another in a way that would be absolutely physically impossible (without the use of metal welding, that is). The figures are touching, climbing, and reaching into space. Wall's sculptures, as well as his paintings, exhibit a refined respect for space, and the way shapes move through, interrupt, and interact with it.

So often we appreciate art for its underlying meaning, historical standing, monetary value, social commentary—a vast array of things other than the art itself. Brian Wall's work does not encourage attention towards any of these things, but rather urges the viewers to consider the shapes as he arranges them. The strength of his artwork lies within Wall's shapes and the brilliant, powerful way in which he presents them. *Squaring the Circle* offers its viewers a refreshing opportunity to appreciate the simple, pure value in the visual and compositional components of art.