

These young sculptors are producing what Dan Cameron thinks is some of this season's best work

By mid-1989, it had become clear to astute New York viewers that the radical vanguard of American sculpture was undergoing a stylistic change that had the potential to carry it decisively into the 1990s. As a conscious refutation of the sleek, commerce-inflected work of Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach, the looser, often grungier installations created by Cady Noland, Jessica Stockholder, Félix González-Torres and Karen Kilimnik heralded a distinct shift in the ways in which found materials were incorporated, often in the service of a critique of technocratic society that was delivered in terms that seemed direct, even scathing, after the studied ambivalence favored by their immediate predecessors. Much as the artists themselves detested the handle, a shorthand name was soon coined to describe their work: "Scatter." Referring to the way materials were distributed across every available surface of the gallery (especially the floor), Scatter found itself rather quickly absorbed into the larger '90s megamovement that continues to be referred to as Installation—an equally opaque moniker that embraces everything from Matthew Barney's high-endurance video rituals to Renee Green's low-tech reading-room devoted to books about African-American identity, which was seen at the recent Whitney Biennial.

Now, we are seeing the sudden emergence of a handful of artists who seem to be picking up where Noland and Stockholder left off. Occurring at a time of relative uncertainty about where the contemporary art world may be headed, the coming together of these disparate artists may constitute something less than a movement, but it is considerably more than a simple coincidence. As far as what to call it goes, the work of Luca Buvoli, Larry Mantello, Jason Rhoades, Eran Schaerf and Daniel Weiner almost begs to be labeled "Scatter II"—or perhaps, in observance of the fact that it is so far a boys-only club, "Son of Scatter." But whatever they're tagged, these artists have produced some of the most impressive work so far this season.

Ironically, the work of Buvoli and Schaerf became

Son of "Scatter"

visible to New Yorkers earlier this fall through a three-gallery project that dealt primarily with the notion of hiding or disappearance. Entitled (*oh, shyness*), the project—which also featured works by two artists who are considerably more picture-oriented (Beom Kim and Siobhan Liddell)—took place in secondary, even hard-to-find, spaces at the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, the Thread Waxing Space and the Sandra Gering Gallery. Organized by Buvoli, a young Italian artist who has lived in the U.S. for the past 10 years, the show's emphasis on self-effacement hinged on the artists' "refusing an aggressive approach to art and . . . putting in parentheses their relationship to a given structure of knowledge." Indeed, Buvoli's delicate hanging works, in which small fragments of cloth, paper and found metal foil are loosely attached to a thin wire armature, were installed just above or outside one's immediate field of vision, thus defying the viewer's initial efforts to locate them. Based loosely on superhero fantasies derived from comic books, Buvoli's subject matter is markedly different from that of Schaerf, an Israeli-born artist whose work has been included in such recent international exhibitions as Documenta and Sonsbeek. Preferring a more formalistic approach in which found objects become linked together in a quasi-narrative flow, Schaerf's work features odd juxtapositions of materials and objects in order to deconstruct the very idea of composition, which too frequently subsumes the integrity of materials.

With its emphasis on childlike colors, unassuming materials (cloth, plaster, wire) and strangely disproportionate shapes, the art of Daniel Weiner may also seem to belong to the (*oh, shyness*) subgenre of Scatter II. However, in his first major gallery exhibition (in October at Germans van Eck), Weiner demonstrated that the self-effacement evident in the gangling, awkward poses of his anthropomorphic sculptures lends them an endearing, vulnerable quality that is reflected in the fact that one often has to squat down to get a good look. While



Low Cal: Jason Rhoades's CHERRY Makita—Honest Engine Work (detail), post-adolescent neo-mysticism in foam core and cardboard.

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they are not "Scatter" works in the strict sense, Weiner's plantlike accretions occupy a hybrid stage somewhere between the intimate fetishes of Buvoli and Schaefer and the more expansive vision of an artist like Rona Pondick.

It is interesting to note that many of this new group of young artists are either non-Americans or at least non-New Yorkers, and their recognition in SoHo has not necessarily been predicated on success achieved in their hometowns. Larry Mantello and Jason Rhoades are both young sculptors who have been plucked from the fragmented underground scene in L.A., where they continue to live, and

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been given the star treatment by their N.Y. dealers—Jose Freire and David Zwirner, respectively. And even though the two artists favor accumulation overkill as a modus operandi, that's where the similarity between them ends. Mantello's breed of maximalism proposes a revenge-of-kitsch sensibility that may suggest Jeff Koons at first glance, but is really addressed to the constant barrage of cultural information in our society. Stringing and stacking together thousands of brand-new key chains, lighters, signs, T-shirts, animal figurines, helium balloons and other gift-shop gewgaws (he has a penchant for leaving the price tags on), Mantello creates display altars that fall

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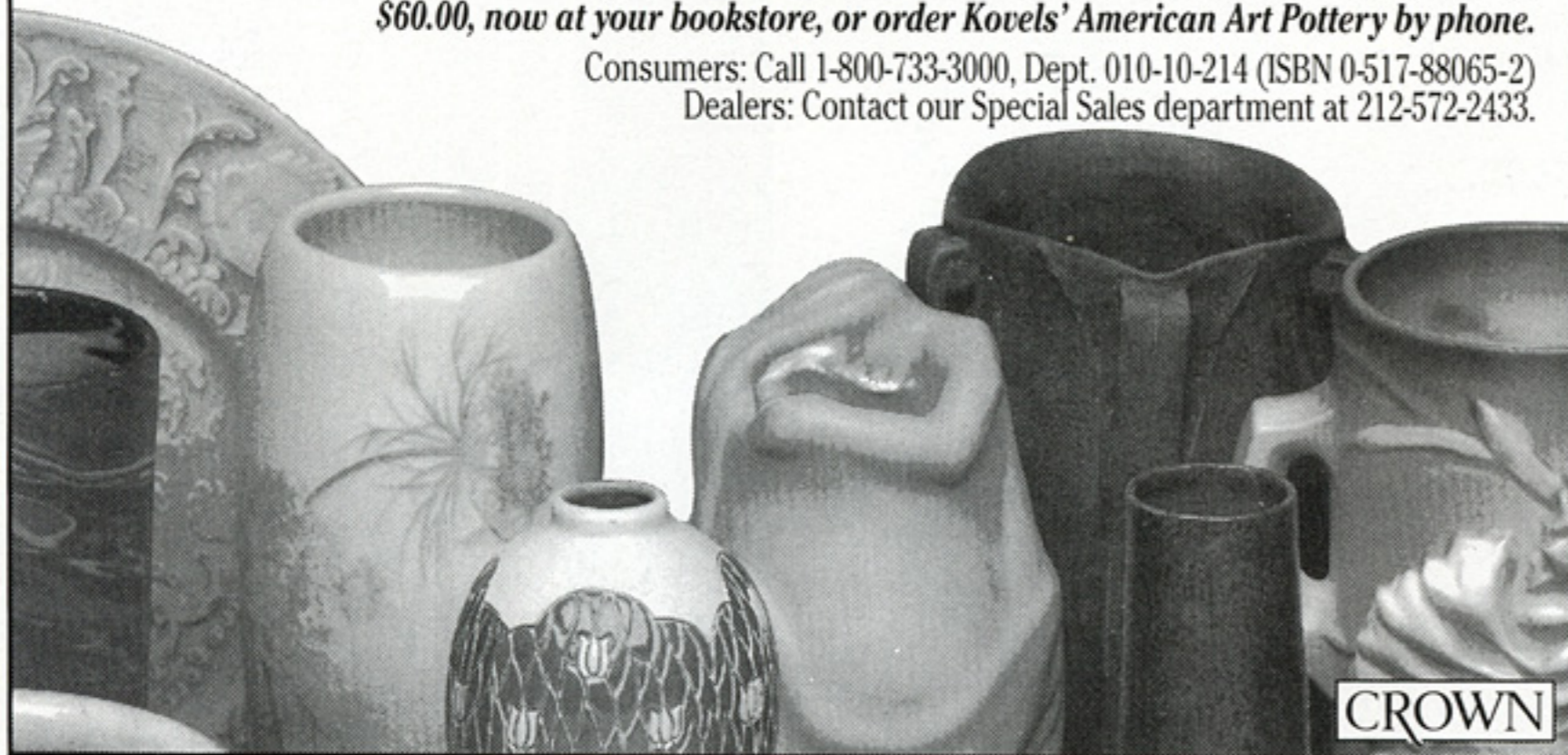
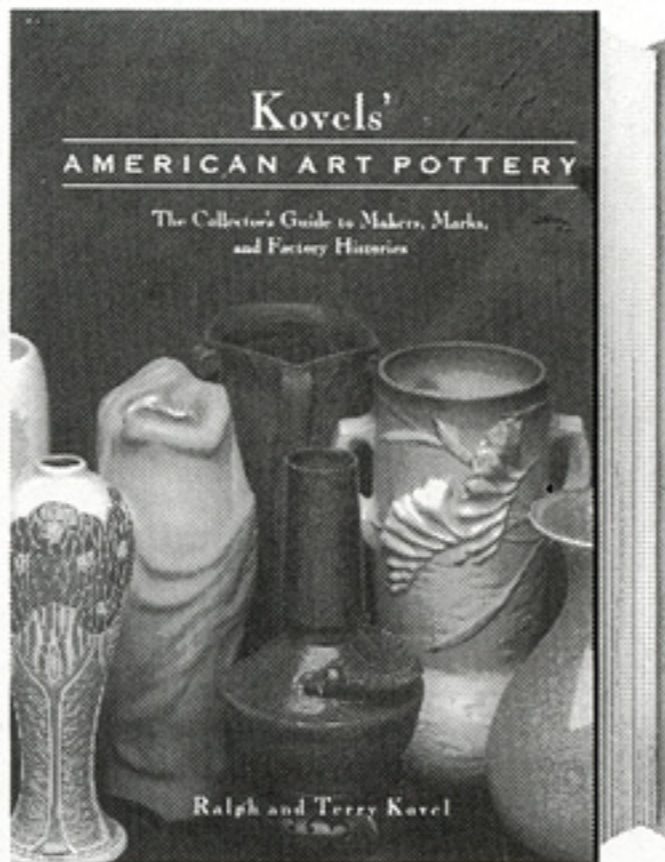
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somewhere between morbid fascination and the blind hilarity of the truly obsessed.

Rhoades's exhibition at Zwirner in September, entitled *CHERRY Makita—Honest Engine Work*, was based on a familiar California icon: the combination garage/workshop with a stripped V-8 engine inside. Although in this case the engine was real, Rhoades's site differs from its prototype in that almost everything else—the garage itself, tools, benches and the like—has been patched together, with poetic ricketyness, out of foam core and cardboard, tin foil, paper, calendars, Polaroids and discarded bits of almost anything else you can imagine. Indeed, Rhoades's work recalls early environments by Claes Oldenburg, like 1961 *Ray Gun*, in which the obvious fragility of the individual elements is superseded by the apparent rawness of the spectacle itself.

While in the early 1960s such a gesture served as an homage to the unexpected beauty of the crowded urban environment, Rhoades's sensibility owes more to the strain of post-adolescent neo-mysticism that is currently so prevalent in southern California art. And yet, by also pushing the idea of a self-contained universe to such a visual and psychological extreme, the *CHERRY Makita* installation demonstrates just what it is that makes *Scatter II* so different from its namesake. Like that of the other artists discussed here, the impact of Rhoades's work depends on an arduous retracing of private myths whose ability to have a more general appeal comes just at a point in contemporary cultural history when demonstrating that art actually can provide its audience with a model of belief seems to be the art world's most timely, yet persistent, challenge. *Dan Cameron is the contemporary editor of Art & Auction.*