

This exhibition is even better than the last one. Bontecou is one of the best artists working anywhere. There are five large reliefs in this show and one small one. Two are unusually complex; the pieces of tarpaulin wired to the rods are reduced to narrow strips, forming a dry, nearly striated surface which is ingested into the off-center and curving hole. One relief is complex in a way that Bontecou has used before; there are numerous and varied holes and much bellicose detail – orificial washers, mouths with saw blades inside, barred ones, muzzles and straps. The Cubistic dispersion of these elements and their literality are less interesting than the explicit, centered form of the majority of the reliefs. A horizontal piece has a long, beetling crest obscuring the top of the supporting iron frame, a central black hole, two flanking ones, and a lower slot. The last relief is without a visible frame and is oval – which is a logical development. The single hole is not a black void but contains gray and white canvas shapes. The quality of Bontecou's reliefs is exceptionally single. Often power lies in a polarization of elements and qualities, or at least in a combination of dissimilar ones. The four obvious aspects of the reliefs – the broad scale, the total shape, the structure, and the image – combine exponentially into an explicit quality and are the aspects of a single form. The new scale excludes everything but the positive elements: there is no field in which the structure or the image occurs; there is no supporting context. The entire shape, the structure, and the image are coextensive. The combination of the three aspects is most complete in the oval relief. The tripled existence of the image makes it an object. Rather than inducing idealization and generalization and being allusive, the object excludes. It is actual and specific and is experienced as an object. It is a minatory object, seemingly capable of firing or swallowing. The image extends from something as social as war to something as private as sex, making one an aspect of the other. The best American art is, in diverse ways, skeptical. Bontecou makes her

work so strong and material that it can only assert itself. Its quality is too intense to be extended into solipsistic generalizations. The work has a primitive, oppressive, and unmitigated individuality. It is credible and awesome.