The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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NEW WORKS BY BARRY FLANAGAN AT MUSEUM

Barry Flanagan, a 33-year-old British artist whose sculptural investigations of the properties and behavior of new materials contributed to post-minimalist developments in the mid- and late-1960s, will show his most recent works from January 22 through March 3 at The Museum of Modern Art.

Flanagan's newest pieces, some of which were first shown at the Rowan Gallery, London, in July, 1973, are being exhibited in the United States for the first time and represent a significant departure from his earlier work. No longer interested in the problems involved in filling space (a function of sculpture), Flanagan is now making hanging wall pieces. Most of these works consist of differently sized and shaped pieces of burlap fastened in overlapping layers to wooden strips which are suspended by twine from the wall. Some of the burlap pieces have painted borders, some have paint applied to larger areas, others are unpainted. While these new pieces seem more closely related to painting than his previous work, a strong sense of the burlap as a specific material, rather than as a two-dimensional surface, is maintained; so, too, is a formal eccentricity which characterized some of his earlier sculpture. The more personal, idiosyncratic quality of the current pieces is indicative of the diffusion and multiplicity of concerns among artists who, several years ago, had been grouped into a few major movements.

Originally a student of architecture, Flanagan moved directly into sculpture and studied at St. Martin's School of Art. Flanagan began working with metal, which, along with plastic, was a preferred sculptural material at St. Martin's, but he quickly abandoned it. "I think I missed in metal ... a general discovery process inherent in the material," the artist has said.

(more)

In 1965, he began working with curtain material which he cut into shapes, sewed, and filled with plaster. These pieces were followed by others consisting of sewn containers filled with different materials, including sand and polystyrene chips, and deployed in various ways -- stacked, heaped, bundled, etc. The resulting shapes were determined not by the artist's hand, but by the properties of the materials themselves (e.g. weight, density) and the constraints acting on the materials (e.g. the shape of the container, the force of gravity). It was this interest in the qualities and behavior of materials per se, rather than a use of materials as "medium" or "means," which characterized not only Flanagan's work but also much advanced sculpture of the late 1960s.

The Flanagan exhibition, directed by Nancy Karumba, Curatorial Assistant of Painting and Sculpture, is part of the Museum's Projects series devoted to recent explorations in art and is sponsored by the British Council and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a federal agency. The Museum of Modern Art gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the New York State Council on the Arts.

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