

...

Also in London, at Maddox Gallery, the American sculptor Willard Boepple showed works spanning much of his life as an artist, from a delicate little “tripod” the mid-1980s to recent, tall, vertical structures, in a range of materials that included bronze, wood, aluminum, and resin – a miniature survey with single or a very few examples standing for important series. Some of the delicate, layered monoprints he makes with a master printer in Cambridge rounded out the selection and emphasized Boepple’s use of color in his three-dimensional works. A first impression was of a pervasive Apollonian calm, embodied with enormous variety. We encountered horizontal wall-mounted pieces, in opaque wood or translucent colored resin, that suggested both loaded shelves and arcane machinery. A dark, blocky, mysterious structure, visually penetrable only through narrow slots, stood for the Temple series, while a cat’s cradle of aluminum bars, punctuated with small incidents, represented the Looms. And more. The intimacy of the smaller pieces was appealing, but the largest works, part of a continuing series of Towers, were among the most impressive. One, an open “cage” of narrow bars, barely contained a shuffle of flat red planes, a weightless cascade that threatened to float free of its confines. The other, made of even narrower elements painted yellow, can be described only as a “Tower” turning itself inside out and losing one side in the process. The result is a gathering of verticals laced with a few eloquently placed horizontals that somehow become triangular and hinge-like. The geometry of the piece defies analysis, but the result is deeply engaging. Yet even this complex, active construction resolves itself in terms of magisterial, classical oppositions of up, down, and across.

What all of these seemingly disparate works have in common is their relationship to the human body. Boepple has never been a figure sculptor but he is acutely sensitive to the proportions of things made for human use. Most of his works take as their point of departure the dimensions of functional objects: the intervals of the rungs of a ladder, scaled to an average step, or the dimensions of a shelf designed to hold things scaled to the hand. Our subliminal awareness of these relationships humanizes Boepple’s work. It’s the opposite of the discomfort we feel when a doorknob or a countertop is at the wrong height; part of the pleasure of Boepple’s sculptures is their tacit sense of “rightness,” a built-in sense of harmony caused by comfortable – the best sense – proportions. There is no overt reference to the appearance of the figure in Boepple’s work, but our unconscious recognition of the qualities of things we employ daily, “the things the body uses,” as he says, that brings his sculptures, however introspective, to vivid life.