

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Bell's minimalist art reflects major talent

Minimalism hasn't died. It thrives in the art of Larry Bell, a modern master of sculpture who is having his first showing here at the Wood Street Galleries.

Minimalism was a beautiful but brief art movement of the 1970-80s that was difficult to talk or write about meaningfully. You had to experience it directly.

Describing its exquisite edges and painted surfaces grew tiresome, as did perhaps the art itself. It had no message other than its own finesse as reason enough for being. Why? Every so often it is important to see contemporary art that is elegant even in our inelegant age. Sometimes this is needed just to know what some artists are capable of.

Bell, who came to fame in Los Angeles and now at 60 lives comfortably producing art in Taos,

N.M., is displaying two major glass sculptures here and some smaller works, including nine on paper.

In "6x6x4ABCD," specially re-arranged for Pittsburgh, two subtly coated V-shapes of half-inch-thick plate glass are placed in a repeated chevron pattern. Walking around it and then between the "Vs" the viewer shares in aspects of the visible and invisible, the pristine and the gorgeously subtle. The sculpture is the essence of a labyrinth.

But this is a maze that both reflects and repulses the eye's penetration. As Los Angeles curator David Pagel writes in a wall statement, "Larry Bell's art invites viewers to pay as much attention to how we see things as to what we see."

And so, because the galleries are swept clean of everything but sculptures with natural and artificial light, the viewer is encouraged to let the sculptures work their quiet magic.

But how do you describe an edge that has become a vertical line and that suddenly seems to disappear as it descends? It is not only a matter of mirrored surfaces but also ones that can partly be seen through.

After that description, it is up to each viewer to evaluate the experience individually. And it is one thing to be alone in the gallery and

another when people cast their images on the surfaces.

The other large work, "4 Panels Gray Solar Glass," 1997, is made of two double squares through which the viewer may walk diagonally. The reflecting panels repeat images so the viewer isn't always sure which image is the reflection and which is being seen through a clear panel. One square is dark, the other clear. Yin and yang, so to speak, but there is no attempt to imbue this art with deeper messages. It doesn't work that way, nor does it need to.

Bell is extremely accomplished as both a sculptor and painter. In his recent paintings he cannibalizes his 1970s abstracts by bonding them in small squares to paper.

Some contain a bit of the iridescence of his wall paintings, including his outstanding "Moses X-ing the Delaware," 1990, owned by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and illustrated in a catalog at the galleries.

Since my first viewing of Bell's beveled shelves at New York's Pace Gallery in 1974, I have always been interested and excited by his unique aesthetic. It is wonderful to have his art at the Wood Street Galleries.

The impact in the upper gallery, however, would have been stronger with two of his large abstract paint-

ings in dialogue with his sculpture. That may be a job for a larger Cultural Trust gallery Downtown. I saw how difficult it was to squeeze Bell's large crates into Wood Street's small elevator.

"Larry Bell" continues through May 8. Free. Tuesday through Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

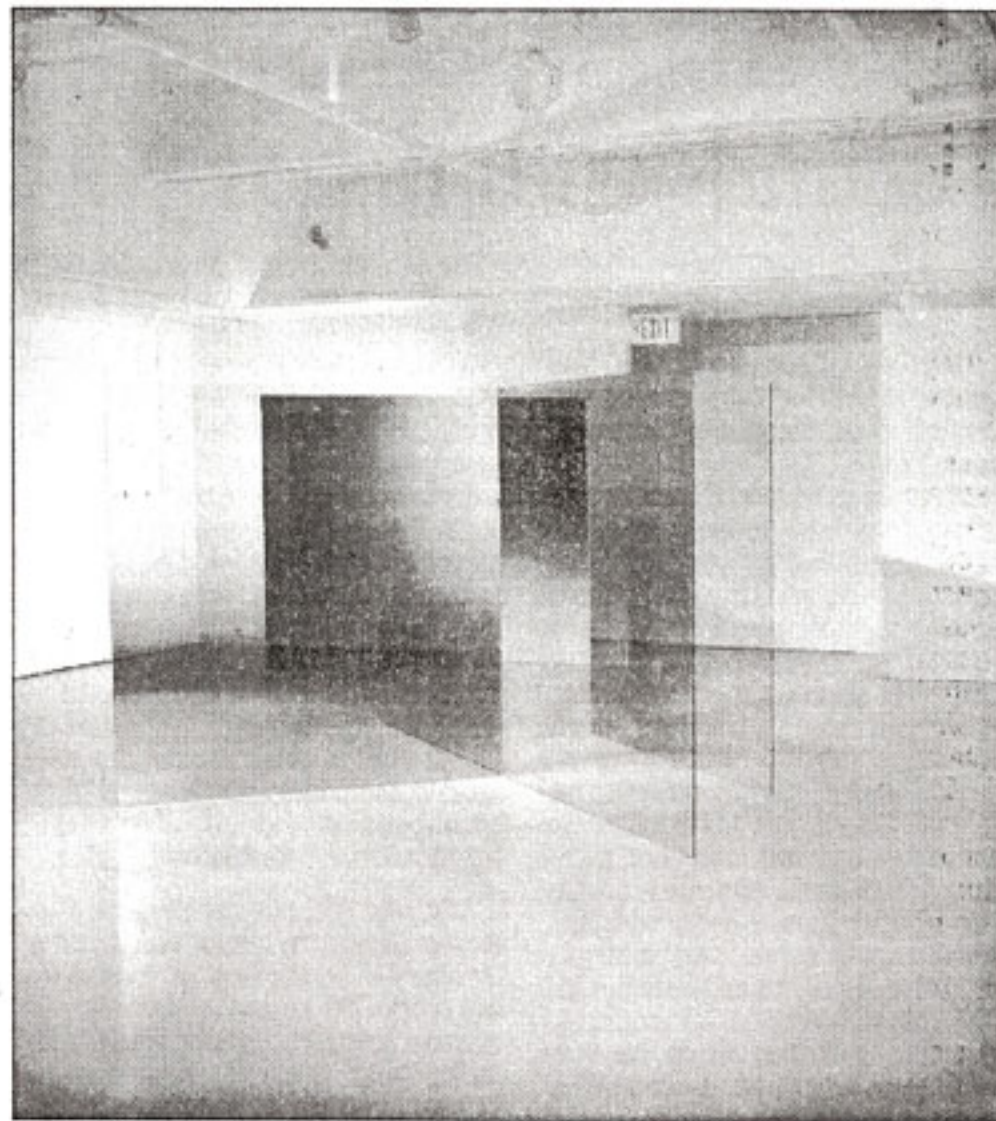
Art notes

- In tomorrow's Magazine, the Post-Gazette will announce a bus tour to "Monet at Giverny," Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, and "Angels from the Vatican," Toronto, June 11-13. Visits include Frank Lloyd Wright houses in Buffalo and Toronto's Casa Loma. Call Gulliver's Travels, 412-441-3131.

- Robert C. Wilburn, 55, former president of Carnegie Institute and for seven years president/CEO of Colonial Williamsburg, will resign in July to return to his Blairsville farm.

- Fiber artist Rae Gold will exhibit in the annual Smithsonian Craft Show April 15-18 in the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.

- Howard Lieberman will exhibit a large graphite drawing in "Contemporary Visions '99,"



Wood Street Galleries
Larry Bell's glass sculpture "6x6x4ABCD" adds special reflective subtlety to Wood Street Galleries.

through April 10, University of Bridgeport, Conn. Philip Pearlstein was the juror.

- The Andy Warhol Museum will

display 21 Warhol still lifes at the governor's residence, Harrisburg, Tuesday through Oct. 29. To tour, call 717-772-9130.