

Ray of light

Artist brings bright sculptures
to Wood Street

By **DONALD MILLER**

Post-Gazette Art and Architecture Critic

Larry Bell, internationally known light and space artist, says he thought his new show at the Wood Street Galleries would be a shoo-in.

But Midwest snow and a moving truck with a bad clutch delayed delivery of his work here until Tuesday morning. Fortunately, Bell's collages, small glass sculptures and a site-specific work utilizing the second-floor gallery's floor-to-ceiling windows will open tonight as planned.

Bell has never exhibited in Pittsburgh before, but I well remember a show of his at New York's Pace Gallery (now PaceWildenstein) in the early 1970s when his beveled plate glass shelves reflected the gallery's overhead lights with prismatic rays, recalling subtle rainbows.

Bell's parents — his father, Hy-men Bell, was an insurance broker/salesman — lived for a time in the early 1930s in Jeannette, Westmoreland County. They then moved to Cleveland and Chicago, where Larry Bell was born and lived till he was 5. He then grew up in Los Angeles, where he gained fame with painters Ed Rucha, Ed Moses and Billy Al Bengston in the 1960s and '70s. All of these artists were, and some still are, West Coast stars of contemporary art.

Now 60, Bell and his wife, Janice Webb, have lived for 26 years in laid-back Taos, N.M., where they reared three children. At age 42 a doctor told Bell he had only 40 percent hearing in both ears, which he had not been aware of before. Except for his hearing devices, you would not know the man in the black Stetson has a problem.

Bell's work is in many museums and he continues to exhibit in the United States and Europe. Recent show sites include two in Norway last year, one in Iceland and another coming at the Galerie Montenay, Paris. Bell had a retrospective at

art PREVIEW

LARRY BELL

WHERE: Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood St., Downtown.

WHEN: Bell will be present for his opening tonight from 5:30-7:30. His exhibition continues through May 8. Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

INFORMATION: 412-471-5605.

the Albuquerque Museum of Art in 1996-97.

In his best-known glass sculptures, Bell literally reflects many California artists' interest in light and perspective with the abstract placement of angular glass panels, which he has been constructing since the 1960s.

The artist places advanced polymer coatings on these sculptures that both reflect and refract light. Both minimal in style and technically sophisticated in concept, Bell's environments sometimes present real and illusory chambers that can be walked through.

Some of these interactive sculptures are eight feet or more square. The interplay of these glass surfaces, lighting and individual perception offer unique combinations. His translucent surfaces bend light passing through the glass so that the sculptures' appearances seem to change.

As Collette Chattopadhyay accurately wrote in the April 1998 Sculpture magazine: "Rather than accentuating traditional sculptural interests in mass that were combined by the minimalists with interests in industrial fabrication, Bell's works function as visual riddles, accentuating shifting light, color refraction,



Larry Bell and his "(Untitled) 6x6x4 ABCD," 1999.

V.W.H. Campbell/Post-Gazette

and viewer perception."

But that's not all. Having built a collection of 6,000 collages in the 1970s, two years ago Bell began cutting up these chips of canvas and recombining them, creating new abstractions that please him. He recently created a 20-foot col-

lage for a new building in San Francisco.

"But I still like to show glass sculptures and have a serious inventory," he said here. "I seem to be three artists at once, in glass, bronze and collage. These media are not in conflict, except for the in-

tensive work and time they consume. I keep them in three separate spaces."

"There is no boredom in my life — no time for it," he also said. "I do wish for sensuous boredom. But I have little tolerance for sitting around. I have to be busy."