

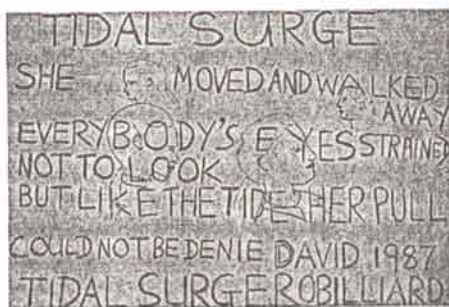
Robert Barry, *Installation view*, 1990.
Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

the support of a relatively small but influential contingent that may have the potency to resonate for a number of years. For this writer, a case in point is **David Robilliard** (Hirschl & Adler Modern, September 13–October 6), a British painter/poet who, at the age of 36 in 1988, died of AIDS. During the mid-1980s, Robilliard apparently became friendly with, among others, Gilbert and George, who supported him early, and have continued to endorse the work after his death. These observations are not meant to be snide: many artists undergo such career transformations, and the system of promotion is always somewhat arbitrary in terms of its focal points. So Robilliard is not merely the abstract construct of a particular constituency of support that existed and persists, but the claims made for his work by individuals of considerable influence—particularly within the British context—seem quite outlandish. As a type of interface between the verbal order within the poetic and the visual/pictorial lexicon of the visual arts, Robilliard's painting is less an exploration of this very cross-pollination than a particularly unfortunate by-product of it. It has an extremely offhand, hyper-casual quality about it that evokes a sense of the naïve, the folk. Each painting is basically composed of the verbal components of a one-line poem, written by hand in upper-case lettering that has a faintly child-like character: red and black no-nonsense pictorial language that is self-consciously "ordinary" and stylistically inert. Simplified renditions of heads—or are they portraits?—crop up consistently in between the verbal elements, which also include the title, date, and artist's signature—all incorporated into the pictorial framework. *An acorn on a tree is desperate to be* is the title of a 1987 painting/poem, and its quirky economy of language is both amusing and charming. But these are momentary pleasures that give way to a recognition of the degree to which both the poetic and visual languages developed by Robilliard remain too satisfied with a level of cultivated simplicity that reads as a self-conscious refusal to engage in a rigorous exploration of this fertile terrain. Perhaps this artist died before arriving at a fuller articulation; perhaps not. But this speculation

is quite beside the point: these paintings, ultimately, do little more than point towards a level of mediocrity that is not even *interesting*.

On the other hand, **Andrew Masullo's** mediocrity is by now legendary: like poison ivy, one should avoid this work at any and all costs. (This comment may in fact lead to quite the opposite, but one cannot be responsible for the masochistic tendencies of others.) His pseudo-salon-style collations of adjusted readymade art objects/objets d'artefact have only provoked a rabid form of disinterestedness for this writer in the past. Those who have previously lauded Masullo's facile ability to transform any "everyday" object into a so-called aesthetic configuration must be commended for at least one thing: they facilitate, though quite unwittingly, the exposure of their own lack of criticality in the face of trivial art. Masullo's work, an abundance of which was recently on display at fiction/nonfiction (September 4–October 6), postures as both programmatically conceptual (i.e., it functions through a systemic framework of numbering, much like Borofsky) and irrepressibly intuitive or subjective in its ravenous accumulation of artifacts from the material world. He attempts to manipulate these materials so as to index his own psychological relationship to the past—in particular, the 1950s. What results, however, is the worst and most embarrassing form of nostalgia—effected through a gratuitous display of images designed to provoke historical reflection and the workings of memory. Just because an artist happens to have found a small place for himself during a period of resigned permissiveness regarding the lowest common denominator—and lackluster criticality—does not mean we have to accept it.

You can always count on **Wade Saunders** to produce a sophisticated, elegant, and precious sculptural object that extends a trajectory of post-minimalist practice into an essentially formalist realm, even while attempting to infuse the object with symbolic orders of meaning. In this exhibition at Diane Brown (September 12–October 6), Saunders continues a method of cross-pollination of a basically neo-modernist geometric lexicon and other externalized



David Robilliard, *Tidal Surge*, 1987, Acrylic on canvas, 39 1/4" x 59". Courtesy Hirschl & Adler Modern.



Wade Saunders, *Tanjore*, 1990, Granite, silk, 33 1/4" x 14" x 14". Courtesy Diane Brown Gallery.

cultural influences; in this case, it is the "structural iconography" of Indian temple sculpture—thus the title of the show, *Devotional Geometry*. These are works that Saunders produced during a five-month stay in India, and they bear only a connotational relationship to the sculptural language of that cultural context. Not unsurprisingly, Saunders is less interested in offering a stylistic index of a particular non-Western aesthetic/religious tradition, and more concerned with how such appropriated forms may be synthesized within an essentially First World aesthetic order. These freestanding granite pieces all resemble abstracted figures as well as incomplete columns; that is, they reveal a structure which seems to cross-reference the totemic "surrogate" for the body with an architectural scheme. Each object is sectional, and Saunders has incorporated richly colored Indian silks into the overall infrastructure so as to underscore the "constructedness" of this sculptural endeavor. In sum, these are beautiful objects that indicate a desire to develop a language predicated upon the synthesis of cultural influence; Saunders only permits the residue, the lingering scent of that Other tradition. Cultural difference is glossed over in favor of the notion and practice of an all-encompassing aesthetic hybridization. Clearly, Saunders is not concerned with the larger cultural, political, and ideological implications of this method.

When the artist claims to hold a mirror up to a dimension of contemporary society so as to reveal a so-called "objective truth" about those very social conditions, that artist, wittingly or unwittingly, is necessarily implicating himself within the mimetic of a documentary frame; in other words, his/her reflection inscribes itself into the "imaginary scene" of the representational domain, the symbolic order, or the allegorical structure. The distinction between the