

San Francisco Chronicle

The Largest Daily Circulation in Northern California

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1982

32

From Glittery Baubles to the Undersides of Freeways

By Thomas Albright

Around the galleries:

• Lynda Benglis is an artist who has inexplicably — at least to me — sustained a reputation in the international art scene for making glitzy baubles of candle wax or plaster wrapped in bunting and covered with sparklies, glitteries and gaudy Day-Glo colors.

In her new wall-hangings, at the Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, 228 Grant Avenue, Benglis has switched from soft, malleable materials to cast bronze, coated variously with vaporized aluminum, copper and/or tin.

They still have the creased, pleated, gnarled and/or knotted appearance of unwashable fabrics (their titles seem designed to evoke the idea of classical Grecian drapery) that have been thrown in a machine washer by mistake, and the surfaces are so thoroughly coated and covered with their metallic veneers that just about any kind of substance might be underneath. Truth to materials is another part of the Modernist canon that seems to have gone out the window in this post-Modernist era of cosmetic special effects.

The surfaces of these new pieces are simpler and less busy, if no less shiny, than they used to be in Benglis' work, throwing correspondingly more emphasis on their shapes. These sometimes suggest the forms of exotic sea shells, sometimes — as in No. 10 — of the human figure, or at least of clothing from which a figure has been removed. Given their Spandex esthetic,

they certainly are pretty, among the most attractive baubles Benglis has done. Still, a bauble is a bauble is a bangle.

• The "Urban Landscapes" of Richard Sheehan, at Jeremy Stone, 126 Post Street, are strongly cast in the tradition of the Bay Area Figurative school, in a style of broad, painterly realism that variously brings to mind James Weeks and Wayne Thiebaud.

Sheehan has a predilection for the undersides of freeway overpasses, and the sharp contrasts they afford between the bold, structural patterns of the deep shadows that they cast and the images of buildings and landscape, which acquire more or less detailed defini-

tion under the intense light outside.

But his most distinctive paintings are in varying tones of gray, the forms — of oil refineries and factories — as much etched into as painted on the slick, creamy surfaces.