

## Arts & Galleries

# ART COMMENTARY *With Marion Wolberg Weiss*

### "RITES OF SPRING": SCULPTURE AT LONGHOUSE

There's something about sculpture and spring that go together. Consider Bill King's work (critiqued last week) and this week's opening of new installations at LongHouse Reserve. Is it sculpture's three-dimensionality that we're drawn to – the idea of wholeness and closure, which many paintings can't deliver because they exist in a two-dimensional realm?

Spring, like sculpture, also signifies integrity and completeness. A beginning and, oddly enough, an end.

The LongHouse Reserve is both a place where an eternal spring predominates an installation itself, despite individual sculptural pieces scattered throughout the grounds. Thus, the works are perceived in a context, as part of a whole.

Defining LongHouse's "whole" can be obvious. For example, the interplay of the senses, including sights (flowers, trees, benches, sculpture, water), sounds (birds, visitors), textures and smells creates a world unto itself where everything is a fragment of everything else.

To separate the part that sculpture plays in this environment is less obvious. Consider some of the



Photo by M.W. Weiss

Work by Dennis Oppenheim

older pieces, like Willem de Kooning's "Reclining Figure" recalling, for this critic, a sprawling, slouching piece by Lynda Benglis. Or Roy Lichtenstein's red and blue Pop Art house on sticks that moves when the spectator moves, or Louise Nevelson's "Frozen Laces-Four," an intimidating geometrical configuration that seems like a torture chamber. All these pieces are immensely imposing, even frightening, in their own way. Yet they are positioned in a Garden of Eden, a place of resolution and unity.

The new installations reverberate similarly. Dennis Oppenheim's "Entrance to a Garden" is obviously appropriate to the surroundings, title-wise. But the structure itself contradicts the nature-like connotation, its steel and mesh material and resemblance to a man's shirt, signifying a jolt to the senses. Even so, it makes a powerful statement, contradictory and disturbing as it is.

Dale Chihuly's "Jack's Walla Walla," a group of glass balls that float in LongHouse's pond, does not startle us as some other works have done. Indeed, they are a calming presence in the setting. Their archetypal forms, however, share a commonality with Shinman Yamada's ceramic work, "Hamon." While the glass balls are light and airy compared to Mr. Yamada's large, seemingly stone-like sculptures, both installations capture the spirit of ancient Celtic sites in Southwestern England.

Such images also generate powerful, perhaps disconcerting feelings in this eternal place of spring.

LongHouse Reserve is open all summer. Call 631-329-3568 for hours. More of Dennis Oppenheim's work can be seen at Rebecca Cooper's gallery, The Gallery, 125 Main Street, Sag Harbor.