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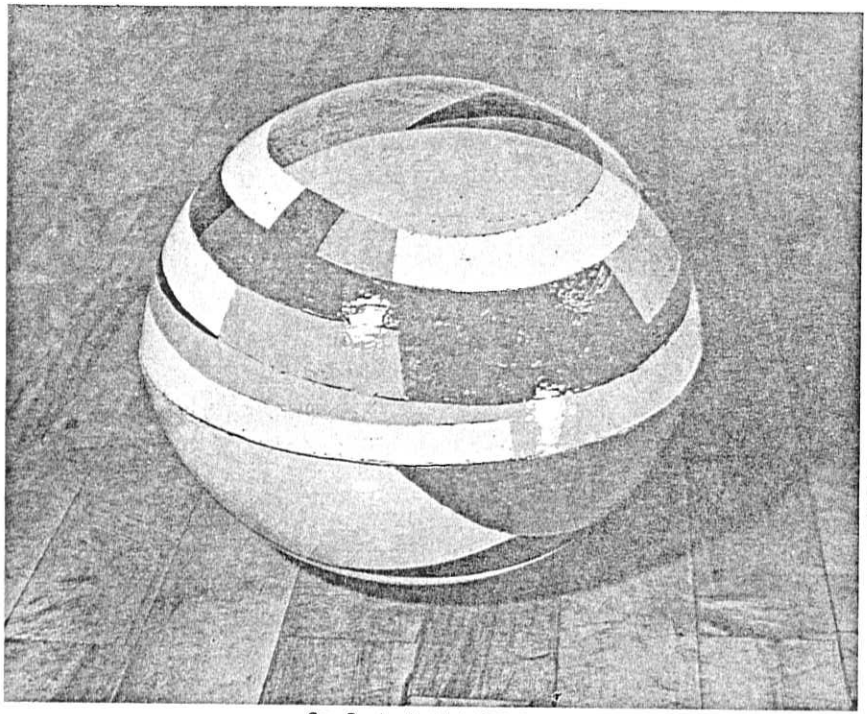
GARY BURNLEY, Artists Space:



Gary Burnley, Untitled, 1979. Della Robia glaze on hydrastone, 15" diameter.

I'd like to think that GARY BURNLEY's paintings-that-would-be-sculptures (or is it vice-versa?) are the product of a polemic mind. These "paintings" (his term—it was on the announcement) are on the surfaces of freestanding hydrostone spheres—enameled and polyurethaned—that are a constellation of Constructivist planets. These are paintings that have the painstaking square peg on rounded surface attitude. Truly mutant work, like the offspring of a horse and a donkey, this is the hybrid of painting and sculpture. Unlike a mule, Burnley's work is not sterile.

They've got everything: the familiar look of small sculpture, the opulence of primary color, the luster of a gem, and the shape of a world. This seems simplistic to write, but to look at they're remarkably sophisticated. Unlike practically everything else around, these are not so small they're precious, not so opulent as to be Decorative—they're decorative—not so lustrous as to be totally obsessed with surface, and not so symbolic as to be wincingly obvious. Burnley can refer to galactic order without resorting to the special effects squad.

Sometimes these paintings make me think of oversize croquet balls, and other times they have the feel of cloisonné orbs. There's a second hybrid quality that has nothing to with the marriage of painting and sculpture but everything to do with the union of recreation with decoration. They have the same heraldic confidence of a Robert Indiana (who also did the design for the basketball court of the Pacers).

I guess I'm so enthusiastic about this work because it has that winning combination of the right proportions (*right* meaning it works for me) of the familiar and the strange. The familiarities I've cited; the oddball qualities are harder to identify. I would like to pretend I've never seen sculpture that was painting, but then I'd have to forget a lot of Constructivist and Cubist work, not to speak of Frank Stella's and Ellsworth Kelly's recent output (or of Kenny Price, Roger Brown, Judy Pfaff and a scizillion other practitioners). It's not the materials that are foreign—all three are commonplace. I guess what's quirky or idiosyncratic (read: special) about Burnley is that most paintings are about the depiction of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, while his are about the depiction of a two-dimentional space on a three-dimensional surface. It's that simple. But wonderful.

—CARRIE RICKEY