

# PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

77 GEARY STREET MEZZANINE SAN FRANCISCO CA 94108 415.788.5126 F 788.5207

## San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

April 24, 1995

### Dennis Leon's Rough Bronzes

Sculpture exhibition at Haines

By Kenneth Baker

Years ago Sol LeWitt remarked that good sculpture ought to be "smart enough to be dumb," and I think his point still holds true.

Much contemporary sculpture, especially on the West Coast, fails by trying too hard -- to amuse, to be expressive, to manipulate response -- rather than turning its own physical inertia to advantage.

The recent work of Bay Area sculptor **Dennis Leon**, at the Haines Gallery, 49 Geary Street (through April 29), cannot be faulted for playing to its viewers.

Like it or not, Leon's work is instantly and intuitively recognizable as sculpture, at least in a gallery setting.

When Leon lays a crusty bronze boomerang shape on the floor (*Dog Leg*), it could only be sculpture (or nonsense). The recognition frees you to enjoy its moss-green patina and the way it flickers between relief-map-like landscape reference and blank objecthood.

Viewed referentially, the piece is a miniature. And seeing it that way draws your attention to scale, the relation between its true size and your own.

For all its aesthetic sophistication, Leon's work typically neither suggests where it might belong (except at floor level), nor makes a point of contemporary sculpture's rootless condition, although a large standing piece here in the form of an X almost makes a joke of marking the spot where it happens to stand.

(All the pieces on view were cast in bronze from wax poured over various simple forms and left to harden.)

Further, Leon's work rarely concerns itself with the disparate values of vantage points from which we might view it.

Offsetting these slack aspects of his art are its rough aloofness and its strong surface character, which make it pleasing to study and emphasize its objectivity, its refusal of expressive stylization.