



View of Larry Bell's exhibition of work from 2005, showing (on wall, left to right) NVD (New Vapor Drawing) #28 and NVD #29, both paper coated with aluminum and silicon monoxide, with (foreground, left to right) Cube #8—Clear, inconel-coated clear glass, and Cube #9—Amber, inconel-coated amber glass; at Jacobson Howard Gallery, New York.

Through a Glass, Darkly

Larry Bell's glass sculptures and related drawings, featured in two recent gallery shows in New York, present intriguing perceptual conundrums.

BY MATTHEW GUY NICHOLS

Best known for his glass cube sculptures from the 1960s, Larry Bell has often been labeled a Minimalist. While the geometric clarity and industrial manufacture of his work may partially justify this designation, Bell tends to reject the literal demands of Minimalism and teases the eye with perceptual illusions. A pair of recent exhibitions underscored this point while offering complementary views of the artist's old and new work.

PaceWildenstein displayed Bell's sculptures from the 1960s, including an untitled, 40-inch glass cube from 1969 that rests on a low Plexi-

glas pedestal. At first glance, this sculpture appears uniformly gray, a product of the thin metallic finishes Bell typically applies to glass with a vacuum coating machine. When circling this work, however, one notices that its opacity changes from one side to the next. While one face of the cube is an impenetrable mirror, the other, relatively transparent sides provide views inside the glass box where one's hazily reflected body appears momentarily confined.

Similar illusions are produced by two freestanding constructions made in 1968. One of these joins two large walls of glass (each measur-

ing around 77 by 69 inches) into a simple V shape. The resulting corner bears the heaviest concentration of metallic finish, which diffuses like smoke across each pane. Standing at the center of this sculpture, one is reminded of the multiple perspectives afforded by dressing room mirrors. But here, the viewer's crisp reflection in the densely coated corner is accompanied by two flanking and fuzzy apparitions of the central self.

Not all of Bell's works shown at PaceWildenstein implicate the viewer's body. Two similar sculptures made in 1970 are long, narrow rectangles of beveled glass affixed horizontally to the walls like empty display shelves. The surface of each 8-foot-long shelf has been frosted with mineral-based tinctures. When light hits them from above, the interior bevels throw pale slivers of rainbow color against the adjacent walls.

While chroma tends to be faint and fugitive in Bell's early sculptures, a selection of recent works at Jacobson Howard was downright colorful. Having abandoned his signature cubes in the 1980s, Bell has recently reconceived these forms in both clear and colored glass.

Two 20-inch cubes from 2005 were made from azure and amber glass, respectively, and dazzled like gemstones atop their clear Plexiglas pedestals.

But the most striking components of this show were four works on paper known as "NVDs (New Vapor Drawings)." Created with the same vacuum coating process that Bell applies to glass, these 5-by-4-foot sheets of paper are crisply subdivided into two or three horizontal registers, causing each to give the distinct impression of a landscape. In *NVD #9* (2003), for example, stacked zones of light and dark gray are made from layers of aluminum and silicon monoxide. These substances also impart a shimmering iridescence to the drawing, which evokes either a sunset, an oil slick, or the miragelike experience that so often engages viewers of Bell's work. □

"Larry Bell: The Sixties" was on view at PaceWildenstein [Sept. 30-Oct. 22], while *"Larry Bell: New Work"* appeared at Jacobson Howard [Oct. 1-Nov. 5], both in New York.

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View of an untitled work from 1968, mineral-coated glass, two panels, each 77½ by 69¼ inches. Photo Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy PaceWildenstein.

