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Sonnabend, New York

I was strolling around New York in August, seeing what was up. I'd read that there was a Barry Le Va show at Sonnabend, but when I went there and pushed the elevator button for the third floor, it didn't light up. A man in the elevator with me pushed five, and sure enough, the elevator skipped three and went straight to five. Sonnabend was closed. Riding back down, the elevator suddenly stopped on three and the doors opened. I got out and the doors closed behind me. Before venturing into the gallery, I pushed the call button to see if the elevator would come back—it would. I entered the silent, unlit space. Nobody there, no visible motion detectors, just numerous black and white forms on the floor. Daylight sliding down from the window gave the forms the air of an industrial park, or more precisely, the Amoco Oil Refinery outside Gary, Indiana. I fancied myself as Tony Smith on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike, and settled in for a private, unauthorized ride.

However, a transcendental experience like Tony Smith's isn't possible with Le Va's work, at least not in a beatific sense of religion, beauty or the open road. The kind of departure induced by Le Va's work is more flat-footed and perplexing; a dry, buzzing, high-tension-wire kind of sensation caused by its persistent indeterminacy. It's never clear whether a Le Va piece has been built up, or is some pared down

a priori model; whether the model is molecular or galactic in scale; or whether there's a model at all. We recognize something in his pieces—a glimmer of repetition, traces of physical and economic forces—that makes us believe it has a visible, definable source.

Walking around, I began to feel like Harry Dean Stanton in Paris, Texas. After a while, I fell back on the idea that if I focused on individual elements (like a Minor White photograph) or stared at the overall group without focusing on anything (like a TV screen) the work would reveal itself. But this was just a crude way of approximating the viewing distance at which some sort of subject matter in my head would fit Le Va's given arrangements—a sort of visual rolodexing, prolonged by the gallery's emptiness. In other words, I was trying to get my buzz going. Some of the forms were grouped by likeness while others seemed to exert logical or gravitational influence on their surrounding forms, like chromosomes lining up just before a cell divides or fast food restaurants clustered around a freeway exit. All were about 18 inches high and cast of hydra-cal, latex and rubber; some were cylinders, some cubes, some longer rectilinear beams.

The forms were intrinsically black and white; the shadows they cast and the spaces between them contradicted and extended their volumes, further blurring the certainty of their edges and the arrangements as a whole—to the point where it was also unclear what direction they were going, whether they were cosmically coming together or entropically falling apart. Like screwing up your eyes in order to see the structural logic in Le Va's work, you can screw up your time frame in order to carbon date its permanence. The duration of a gallery show is one thing; the duration of the pieces another; and the duration of rubber and calcium still another. Out of bounds and out of time, with no voices, no phones ringing, no access and little light, that seemed to be the point.