

Art in Review

Kenny Scharf

'New Sculpture'

*Charles Cowles Gallery
420 West Broadway, SoHo
Through Jan. 25*

Comic books look like high art next to Mr. Scharf's fluent lunacies

of post-Pop painting. So it's a pleasure to report that his zany sculptures — in bronze, yet — are clever, witty and visually literate, with even a touch of, yes, elegance. (Such praise may be the kiss of death for Mr. Scharf. Sorry.)

One of the best is "Tower of Love," a simple double-zigzag topped by a doughnut-like head whose hole suggests a giant eye. Despite the conjunction of a zig and a zag, which gives it a weak-kneed look, this humanoid structure maintains a fine dignity. "Swoosh," in black bronze, is a fat calligraphic curlicue with a question mark top and a tiny pig's tail. A lozenge-like blip protrudes from its side.

An innocent-looking geometric structure called "Hard-sharp-guy" has a base in the shape of a double wing; in the juncture of the wings sit two small pyramids, one inverted on the point of the other. Looking closer, you can see that the winged base is slyly incised with a 19th-century comic-strip smile. Crafty takeoffs on certain Minimalist masters, and even David Smith, can be detected in these sculptures.

In several etchings, familiar Scharf images disport, for instance "Mouthaura," an open, smiling mouth from which a small heart-shaped head pops out. But in their small focus and black-and-whiteness, they have much more appeal than the big, slick canvases now on view at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in SoHo (through Jan. 25) in which Mr. Scharf seems to revisit his early work. As for the sculptures, they're table-top size, housebroken, and can be taken home as pets. Mr. Scharf has a real future here.

GRACE GLUECK