

Abstract

LEE BONTECOU'S EARLY RELIEFS: A CRITICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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American artist Lee Bontecou's oeuvre is often described as difficult to categorize or "mysterious." Her early work—a series of metal and canvas reliefs made between 1959 and 1965—is linked to a range of stylistic associations including such radically divergent movements as assemblage, minimalism and abstract expressionism. Alternately, contemporary art historian Mona Hadler cites a series of iconographic connections between Bontecou's reliefs and the popular culture and politics of the late 1950's and early '60s. Using historian Reinhart Koselleck's theorization of historical time where history is constituted by an amalgamation of "temporal layers" based on particular historical perspectives, this thesis will explore the varied stylistic associations of Bontecou's early reliefs by investigating their artistic as well as social and political contexts. In doing so this thesis will demonstrate that these so-called "mysterious"

forms were created and exhibited in relation to a several different historical perspectives or “temporal layers.”